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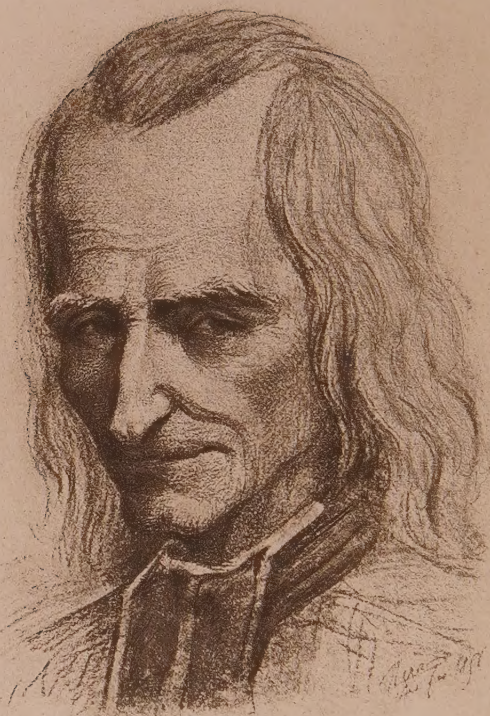
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THE CURÉ OF ARS

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Jean Marie Baptiste Vianney

Curé d'Ars

1786 - 1859

THE CURÉ OF ARS

(The Blessed Jean-Baptiste-Marie Vianney)

BY

THE ABBÉ ALFRED MONNIN

(Translation and Notes by BERTRAM WOLFERSTAN, S.J.)

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THE CLUB OF ARS

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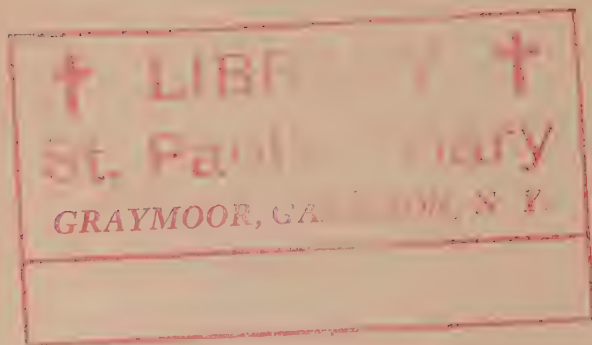
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PROTESTATION BY THE AUTHOR

With humble submission of heart and mind to the Decrees of the Apostolic See, I declare that if in the course of this work I have happened to apply the title of Saint to M. Vianney it is only in token of my veneration, and not with any idea of anticipating the decision of my holy Mother the Catholic and Roman Church, to the authority of which I am happy to yield the most sincere and filial obedience.



THE CURÉ OF ARS

INTRODUCTION

The generation of the righteous shall be blessed. (Ps. cxi., 2.)

He that receiveth a just man in the name of a just man, shall receive the reward of a just man. (Matt. x., 41.)

AT some little distance from Lyons, the traveller who leaves that active and industrious city by way of the suburb of Vaise, arrives at Dardilly. A picturesque village of less than 300 inhabitants, it is composed of two groups of houses, each of which crowns a low hill, and situated between the Paris and Le Bourbonnais roads. The surrounding country looks charming : it is well-wooded, with hill, dale and limpid brook ; while the eye roves over vineyard, meadow and orchard, in pleasing succession. Almost at the entrance of the village stands a modest house with a small enclosure in front of it, on the left-hand side of the road.

Towards the close of the last century this was the home of one of those honest families of husbandmen who have an endless tradition of labour and prayer behind them—a hardy and a healthy race whence have sprung, during the last fifty years, the best part of our priests, religious and soldiers. From time immemorial this abode of the Vianney family had been known throughout the countryside as a house of call for the poor, a rendezvous where wandering beggars were accustomed to seek a sort of patriarchal hospitality for the night.

Among those who thus came to ask shelter in the month of July, 1770, was one who was no ordinary mendicant. But, with half-clothed legs, waist encircled by a miserable cord, untended hair and a cloak of many holes covering his shoulders, there was nothing to distinguish him from the indigent crowd who daily crossed the threshold. He was perhaps twenty years of age and then on his way to Italy.

But less than thirteen years afterwards, in one of the poorest quarters of Rome—between the Capitol, the Viminal and the Esquiline—a strange thing happened and one which astonished the city—a city too much inured to wonders, as a rule, to marvel at them. At one o'clock in the afternoon of Wednesday in the Holy Week of 1783, a mendicant who had been praying for a long time before the statue of Santa Maria dei Monti, fell exhausted on the steps of the church and was carried away in a dying condition. Laid, just as he was, on a bed, he asked for a glass of water. Before taking any of it, he gave thanks to God ; and when he had drunk

he raised his eyes to heaven with such grateful affection as brought tears to the eyes of all present. A few hours later he expired. Very soon, the children of the locality were running about the streets crying : " The Saint is dead " and, by next day, nothing was talked of all over Rome but this. A crowd gathered before the house in which the departed Saint had breathed his last and endeavoured to force an entry. A guard had to be stationed at the door to keep the people out.

The parishioners of Santa Maria dei Monti, wishing to keep his body in their midst, petitioned that it might be interred beneath the flag-stone on which the poor man had usually knelt in prayer, from the *Angelus* until noon, in the church he loved best. Thither was it borne in triumph between a double line of soldiers. Even kings do not have such a magnificent funeral. What glory does not Almighty God impart to His friends : all the glamour of earth pales before it ! However humble the rank from which they came, if God has chosen these souls, He causes the very world they have contemned for love of Him to do them honour.

Hardly had the body been laid to rest, than the people—who had felt instinctively that the tomb would shortly become famous—heard that the blind, the deaf and the dumb were being released from their infirmities, while seemingly hopeless maladies were instantaneously cured ; and all on that flag-stone in the church of Santa Maria dei Monti, whereon the name of the French mendicant had only just been carved. Such virtue issued from this new shrine as recalled the days when our Lord astounded the world by His miraculous power. It became necessary to close the church against the multitude of pilgrims who besieged its doors for, even in the square outside, the popular manifestations of veneration for the deceased tended to become more and more unrestrained.

But this poor man who thus moved the city and the world from the recesses of his tomb ; who—on the very vigil of a revolution which was to spare nothing great or holy, the era of the triumph of Voltaire—avenged the religion of France for the blasphemies and outrages of its enemies by miracles, so numerous, well-attested and wrought in such diverse localities that none dared deny and hardly ventured to scoff at them ; this pauper, foreigner and mendicant, was none other than the person who had partaken of the hospitality of Dardilly, slept under the roof of Pierre Vianney and received in his cracked porringer his portion of the food given by that charitable farmer ; moreover, he is one whom a decree of Pius IX. has (so to speak) taken from the crypt of Santa Maria dei Monti and placed on the Altar of Holy Church. He was, in fact, Benedict Joseph Labre ; at whose tomb we have ourself knelt, praying him to repay the charity he received eighty-six years since by helping us to write this life—this life which is possibly his own work, the result of a wish, prayer, or blessing

invoked by his grateful heart : who can tell ? The Curé of Ars used to say that *when the saints pass, God passes with them*. Why may we not suppose the birth and predestination of Jean-Marie Vianney to have been the result of this passing of God over the hospitable threshold of his grandparents ? In spiritual matters there are mysterious happenings, the secrets of which faith investigates without trepidation ; striking probabilities which are not seldom the key to an entire career ; a simple “ perhaps ” is not without its value. And though proud reason may reject it, a Christian soul—even with a doubt that any manifestation from above has been made—prefers to believe in that preparation, often invisible but always sure, that marks the works of God. What is quite certain is, that this child of benediction, who was one day to gain such a multitude of souls for God, came into the world in the same year in which the power of Benedict Joseph Labre was so strikingly manifested at his tomb.

CHAPTER I

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD OF JEAN-MARIE VIANNEY

What an one, think ye, shall this child be ? For the hand of the Lord was with him. (Luke i., 66.)

Born of pious parents, and prevented by divine love, he passed his childhood in the greatest simplicity and innocence of life. (Roman Breviary : St. Joseph of Cupertino.)

ALTHOUGH the human race is no longer in that blessed state in which innocence is transmitted naturally from father to son ; our divine Redeemer, who came upon earth to make good the losses sustained by human nature, seems to have selected some families in which, by a special grace, virtue would almost appear to be hereditary. In these families the fathers and mothers live such pure and Christian lives that, by sheer force of example, sanctity becomes a sort of second nature in their children. And it is noticeable that, just as in some families vice seems inherent in the blood, so in others virtue has become traditional in the race.

These Christian and traditional virtues appeared in a very marked degree beneath the humble exterior of Matthew Vianney and Marie Beluse his wife, the parents of the subject of these memoirs.* She, the more tender and affectionate of the two, showed in her daily life a gentleness, amiability and high standard of duty only to be found in deeply religious natures. He was cast in a harder and rougher mould but a thoroughly good man withal, who seemed to exemplify in his own person the truth of the ancient proverb that : " a life passed in the fields influences the nature of a man to such a degree that he almost appears to be of the same species as they." These two, like Zachary and Elizabeth, " were both just before God, walking in all the commandments and justifications of the Lord without blame." (Luke i. 6). The blessing of the Patriarchs of old was also theirs, as they had a family of six children in ten years. These children were :—

1. Catherine, afterwards Madame Melin, who was born 1st June, 1780. She died young, leaving no family. A woman of the deepest piety, she had learned from her mother to say the " Hail Mary " every time the clock struck. We were told that on her death-bed an angel under the form of a little child appeared to her, standing close to her brother, Jean-Marie who, although

*Matthew Vianney, son of Pierre Vianney and Marie Charavey of Dardilly, married, on 11th February, 1778, Marie Beluse, daughter of Pierre Beluse and Marguerite Tabard of Écully.

not yet a priest, was at the bedside assisting at her last moments. She died singing a hymn.

2. Jeanne-Marie, born 10th September, 1782, but only lived four or five years.

3. Francis, born 28th September, 1784. He inherited his father's house, dying 6th April, 1855. He left four children and the memory of a blameless life ended by a happy death. Those who knew him used to compare him to the early Christians, and quote him as an example of resignation to the will of God. Someone complained in his presence of the storms which bid fair to ruin the crops : " Quiet, quiet," said he, " He who caused the rain to fall upon the earth can easily dry it up again." Eight days before his death he said to his daughter who was weeping at his bedside : " Don't weep, child, I am not dying yet ; and shall not do so until Holy Thursday." And it was on that day that he died.

4. Jean-Baptiste-Marie, our holy Curé, who was born 8th May, 1786.

5. Marguerite, born 8th October, 1787.

6. On 20th October, 1790, was born another Francis—called *Cadet*, to distinguish him from his brother. He it was who took the place of Jean-Marie in the army, and was killed in the campaign of 1813.

After the conception of her second son, this virtuous mother often offered to God the child she was shortly to bring into the world. She also made a secret vow that, if it should please the Almighty to grant the desire of her heart, she would consecrate the boy to the service of the sanctuary. Consequently, the child, who was baptised on the day of his birth, received the names of Jean-Baptiste and Marie. The god-parents were his paternal uncle, Jean-Marie Vianney and Françoise Martinon, his wife.

Paganism was wont to attach a superstitious significance to the choice of names : and certainly some of them do seem to have been of happy augury. For example : St. Gregory of Nazianzus remarks of St. Melitus, that his name (honey) denoted the sweetness of his manner. St. Agnes bore a name which evidently foreshadowed martyrdom, says St. Ambrose. And so it seems quite appropriate that the Curé of Ars, whose mission it was to preach penance and remission of sins, should have been named after the Precursor—" the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord." (John i, 23.)

Marie Beluse had always considered it her duty to nurse her own children. Jean-Marie was no exception to this rule ; and while she nourished his body, she endeavoured to impart to him all the innocence and graces of her own soul. In this she was very different from many mothers ; to whom the dawn of reason in childhood suggests nothing more than mere amusement, perhaps even boredom. All her efforts were devoted to detecting the

first signs of intelligence in her children, in order to direct them towards God. God delights to receive the first-fruits of all that He has made ; and a Christian mother should consecrate to Him, the first affections of her child's heart, its first conscious efforts, the first words that its lips utter. How careful Madame Vianney was to do all this ! As the Curé of Ars often said : it was their mother who called the children in the morning, to ensure that each of them should raise his or her heart to Almighty God, and that their first thoughts and actions on waking should be devoted to Him.

At the age of eighteen months, Jean-Marie had already learned to join his little hands, place them between those of his mother, and repeat after her : " Jesus. Mary," and as he gradually became able to speak, so he seemed to learn to pray.

One day, when the venerable Curé of Ars was recalling the reminiscences of his childhood, we said to him : " You are very fortunate to have had such a good mother ; and to have been taught by her to be fond of prayer." " After God," replied he, " it was my mother's doing ; she was so good. ' My little Jean-Marie,' she has often said to me, ' if I were to see you offend the good God, it would cause me more pain than if it were any of my other children.' Virtue," added the Curé, " passes direct from the heart of a mother into those of her children, who do cheerfully what they see that she does herself." On another occasion, we remember him saying that a child ought not to be able to think of its mother without tears.

There is a good deal of misapprehension abroad, as to the precise moment when the first notions of God and His service become clear to a soul which has kept its baptismal innocence. In practice, a person's disposition commences to form at the maternal knee, when perhaps no more than five years old. At that age, St. Rose of Lima made a vow of chastity ; and St. Francis of Sales and St. Jane Frances de Chantal attacked the Calvinists, and proved to them that they were wrong, by the words of their own catechism ; while St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi instructed other children, and on the days when her mother had received Holy Communion, sat on her knee and leaned against her bosom, as she said : " to be nearer our Lord."

When he was no more than three, Jean-Marie was led by his love of prayer to seek for solitude. It was easy to see that the Spirit of God already dwelt in his infant heart. Hardly had he learned to speak, than he joined in all the exercises of piety that took place in his presence. As soon as the *Angelus* sounded, either at noon or sunset, he was the first to kneel and recite the *Ave Maria* with infantine gravity. He had, about the house, sundry little hiding-places into which he often disappeared ; and, when he was wanted, would be found in one of them, trying to repeat all the prayers he knew.

The first present he received, was a little wooden image of our Blessed Lady, given him by his mother. But he did not regard it as a plaything : it was to him an object of veneration on which he delighted to gaze, and one which would instantly dry up his childish tears. "Oh ! how I loved that little statue," said he, more than sixty years afterwards. "I could not bear being separated from it, day or night ; and I could not have slept quietly if I had not had it beside me in my little bed."

Very rarely did any childish trouble cause him to weep ; but when it did happen, he could always be consoled by putting into his hands a rosary or a holy image.

In the country the winter evenings are long ; and during them he would talk with his mother about the good God, who was always in his thoughts, whom he loved beyond anything, and whom he was most anxious never to offend. These conversations filled her heart with joy, for she saw in them the fulfilment of all her hopes for her child. Among the pious sentiments that blossomed in this infant soul, and which his excellent mother took the utmost pains to cultivate, devotion to the Blessed Virgin took the first place : and it seemed to expand and grow deeper day by day. "You have long loved the Blessed Virgin, haven't you ?" said his assistant-priest to him one day. "I loved her," replied he, "even before I knew her. She was the first affection of my heart. When I was quite small, I had a nice little chaplet, which made my sister envious, for she wanted it herself—it was one of my earliest troubles. I asked my mother about it ; and she advised me to give it up for the love of God. I did so, but it cost me many tears."

Age only strengthened all his good dispositions ; and prayer appeared to be his greatest pleasure, even before he understood it to be his most important duty. With him, prayer took the place of that unbecoming conversation, with which a country-bred child hardly escapes familiarity. He knew nothing of such unseemly talk : how should he have learned it ? He saw and heard nothing but what was good. At home, no sort of scandal was ever breathed. Besides, when he left his mother's knee, it was only to kneel before his beloved statue, in some quiet corner of the house : there to find peace and happiness in prayer.

He was only four years old, when he disappeared one day, and no one knew what had become of him. His mother, anxious lest some accident should have happened to him, searched everywhere without result. At last she found him on his knees in a remote corner of the stable, praying most fervently. Suppressing any expression of delight and admiration at finding him thus employed, she spoke only of the anxiety he had caused her. "My child, why have you given me all this uneasiness ? Why should you go away and hide, because you want to say your prayers ?" Grieved at the trouble he had caused his mother, the child threw himself

into her arms, exclaiming: "Forgive me, mother; I did not intend to give you any anxiety, and I will not come here again."

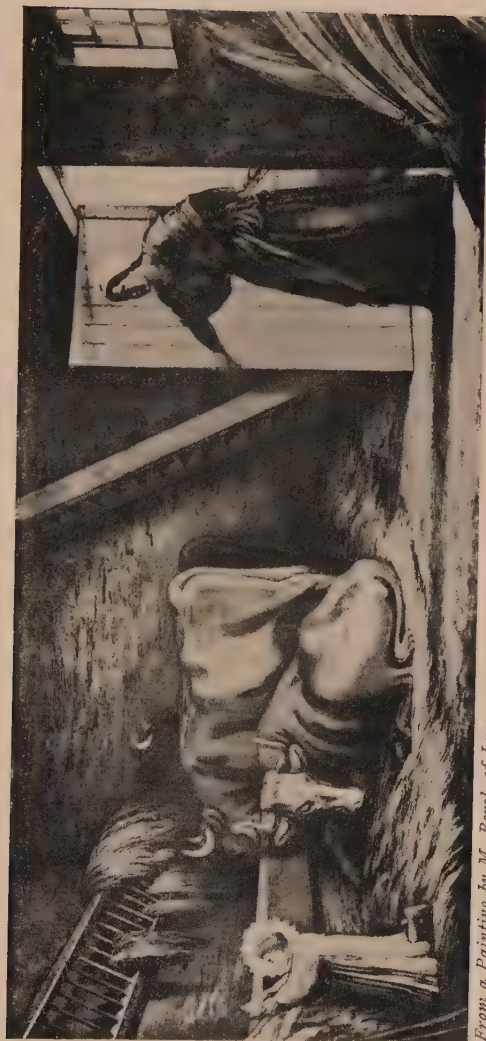
On another occasion, a neighbour, who was not particularly pious, remarked to M. Vianney: "I think that small boy of yours must take me for the devil; he does nothing but make the sign of the Cross when I am here." Madame Vianney, fearing lest Jean-Marie should begin to try to attract notice, or affect singularity, remonstrated with him afterwards. He heard her with great docility, and then replied: "I didn't know our neighbour was looking at me: but, ought one not to make the sign of the Cross at the beginning and end of one's prayers?"

The younger Tobias is said, even from his earliest years, to have had none of the tastes of childhood; but loved to get away from the crowd. He took himself to the Temple, and there devoutly offered to his Lord the first-fruits of his heart and of his land. Jean-Marie Vianney passed his early childhood in much the same fashion. He assisted at Holy Mass with angelic piety, and a recollection beyond his years—a veritable modern Samuel. Instead of having to be pressed to carry out this duty, as is the case with many others, he was always the first to ask to be allowed to attend. The neighbours noticed his earnestness, and remarked that the child already knew the litanies by heart. "You must make your little son a priest," they told his parents.

The faith of his excellent parents, their reverence for holy things, their attachment to the practices of religion, their complete confidence in divine Providence which they invoked alike in fortune and misfortune; all these things tended to instil into his mind unconsciously the principles of the Christian life. He has often been heard to thank heaven that, by the daily example of his parents and almost without effort on his own part, he had been enabled to lead a life of innocence, and conform himself quite naturally to the practice of the most solid virtue.

One is almost tempted to think that a life passed in the fields, at the same time that it restores to man his ancient dominion over the world without, also develops or protects all that is best in the world within—all those noble instincts and generous impulses which, taken together, make for moral greatness. Nature herself tells of things which can be hardly, or not all, heard amid the bustle of towns. Agricultural races are, as a rule, the most religious. The habitual contact with nature in which their lives are passed keeps them constantly as in the presence of God, who appears to them in the wonders of Creation. The sun, the rain, the winds, the frost, all the forces of nature, helpful or hurtful, appeal powerfully to their hearts, for they speak to them of that sovereign Master, at whose will they came upon the earth to be to mankind either a blessing or a bane.

But now a time was approaching when this blessed peace



From a Painting by M. Borel, of Lyons.

Jean-Marie at Prayer in the Stable.

Villard-Vernus, Phot., Ars (Ain).

was to be rudely disturbed. For a day arrived when the little church at Dardilly no longer opened its door for Mass and Vespers on Sunday ; and its bell ceased to call the faithful to prayer on week-days ; and when Jean-Marie asked his mother why he was not sent to Mass, the poor woman only wiped away a tear, and put her hand upon her heart, to make him understand that, henceforth, this would be the only shrine where it was permitted to worship God.

And so, the effect of the Revolution was to close the churches, overturn the altars, drive away the priests, and proscribe, in the name of the new liberty, every outward sign of Catholic worship. Our dear child was barely eight years old ; but it was now too late to endeavour to root out of his soul the religion which had been born with it. And the more he saw ruin light upon everything he had learned to love and reverence, so much the more did he treasure them in his heart.

CHAPTER II

JEAN-MARIE AS SHEPHERD. HIS LOVE OF GOD AND THE POOR

And took him from the flocks of sheep. (Ps. lxxvii., 70.)

He was employed from his childhood, first in guarding the flocks, then in tilling the soil ; but he applied himself much more to the care of his soul, by meditating on heavenly things, than he did to his temporal work . . . leading more the life of a hermit than that of a peasant. (Roman Breviary : St. Felix of Cantalicio.)

COUNTRY-BRED children begin to take their share in the family labour at a very early age ; so, when he was but seven years old, Jean-Marie found himself a shepherd. Matthew Vianney had in his stable, four or five cows, an ass and three sheep. The eldest boy, Francis, had looked after them hitherto ; now it was the turn of Jean-Marie to bring them out into the enclosure, or, when the days became long, to take them to graze at *Lèche*, *Chêne-Rond*, *Pré-Cusin*, or *Chante-Merle*, meadows which belonged to his father.

It seems as though Almighty God has always shown special affection for the pastoral life. Abel was a shepherd. The prophet sought the conqueror of Goliath—the ancestor of the Messiah, the great and saintly king of Israel—among his flocks and herds. Again : it was to shepherds that the angels announced the birth of the Son of God—they were summoned to the manger before the kings. These poor herdsmen were the first adorers of the Eternal Word, who was as needy as they, and set out on the road to Calvary from the cave of Bethlehem. This patronage of shepherds by One who called Himself the Good Shepherd, has continued ever since. Not to mention the illustrious patroness of Paris, the Blessed Germaine Cousin ; or the gentle shepherdess of Laus, who spent upwards of fifty years in the closest union with the Mother of God ; for many favoured souls, such as St. Vincent de Paul and St. Felix of Cantalicio, this pastoral life has been an apprenticeship to the interior life and the ante-chamber of sanctity.

Solitude is not good for those who are unmindful of the presence of God ; and the shepherd's calling, with its accompanying freedom in the fields—perfectly innocent in itself—is not always the best guardian of the morals of childhood. Besides which, it condemns children to almost entire ignorance of spiritual things. But to Jean-Marie, the life was not only welcome and peaceful, but a source of blessing and enlightenment. That heavenly Father, who hides Himself from the wise and prudent and reveals Himself to little ones, appeared everywhere to him in the beauties of nature by which he was surrounded. It is impossible for one who has a pure heart to dwell constantly among the fields with-

out being profoundly impressed with this presence of God in all the works of His hands. God is more evident there than elsewhere, and in all His magnificence—in the blossoming of the flowers, the song of birds, the rustling of trees, the murmur of the stream, the grandeur of the mountain, the immensity of the plain; and at night, in the great vault of heaven clustered with stars. He smiles in the radiance of the sun, and frowns in the gathering of the clouds whence He pours out His floods, or the gentle dews that revive the earth below. Speaking in the voice of His thunder, he appals mankind by His majesty: and yet, by the luxuriance and variety in hill, dale and verdant field, He gently appeals to the hearts of His creatures, and would draw them to Himself. If communion with nature sometimes causes feeble souls to become more feeble still, it is certain that it invigorates those already strong. Noble thoughts and high ideals become nobler and higher by contemplation of those works on which, when He had made them, their Creator looked, and saw that they were very good. And when the creature studies nature with a heart already imbued with holy thoughts and a will inclined to all that is good, she rewards him a hundred-fold—and thus it was with Jean-Marie.

But his piety was not confined to the care and perfection of his own soul in this reposeful life in the fields. It was here that he sowed the seeds of that apostolate he was afterwards to exercise with such marvellous results, and the fame of which has penetrated to the uttermost ends of the earth.

Not far from Dardilly is a lovely dell, cool, shady and green-carpeted, an ideal spot for prayer and meditation. Tiny springs rise under the moss and in the thickets, and empty themselves into a stream which loses itself beneath the shadow of alder and aspen. Clumps of sweet-briar and hawthorn mark the course of this stream which, meandering past bower and glade, has many a time and oft seen the little shepherds playing on its banks. While the beauties of nature delight the eye, there is an air of silence and solitude which appeals rather to the soul. Behind, on either side, and from the heart of a country variegated by rich pasture-land and thick copses of hazel, rise tier upon tier of oaks and elms—which have since been cleared away; while, further off still, are the open fields where the sun ripens corn and vine. This place is called *Chante-Merle* (Song of the blackbird); it was the best grazing ground owned by the Vianneys; and here it was that Jean-Marie very often drove his ass and his three sheep.

Behold him, then: a staff in one hand, while with the other he presses his beloved statue of our Lady to his bosom. Through the bushes and past the banks of the stream he wends his way to the shade beneath the trees. His fellow-shepherds hail his arrival with shouts of welcome. He is a favourite among them is Jean-Marie, for his gentleness and affability: they have, moreover, a real respect for his goodness, and miss him when he does not come.

But, in the midst of the little demonstration, he is seen to be pre-occupied with more serious matters. He spies an ancient willow—still to be seen there—and hastens to enthrone his dear Madonna on a little altar of turf at its foot. Having greeted her with due reverence, he invites the others to do the same ; and he is never so happy as when he has them all kneeling before the image of their holy Mother. Then it is that his enthusiasm takes possession of him—that enthusiasm with which the heart of every priest ought to be filled, and which already burns in the soul of the little apostle. Having recited the *Ave Maria* with a fervour which communicates itself to his friends, he rises and gravely commences to preach to them on devotion to the Blessed Virgin. St. Bernardine of Siena, when he was no older than Jean-Marie, did the same: “He delighted to imitate preachers whom he had heard, using their intonation and gestures, and reproducing their sermons. He took his stand, the other children seated themselves round him ; and to them he discoursed, and thus practised, very early in life, that art in which he afterwards excelled.” (*Life of St. Bernardine of Siena*. Ribadeneira.)

Imagine the scene : the congregation of children, seated in a corner of a field, or in some glade, and hanging on the lips of this modern Bernardine. Forgotten are their games, the thoughtlessness natural to their age is cast aside : there they sit, and so attentively do they listen, that they hardly venture to breathe, lest they should interrupt the little preacher. It must be owned that it was not always thus. The infant apostle had not invariably an interested and attentive audience. Often did the love of a game—quite intelligible at their time of life—lead them to abandon the pulpit in favour of the playground ; and it was not without a pang, that Jean-Marie—like his predecessor, the Baptist—found himself condemned to make his voice heard in the desert. Then he would console himself by seeking some quiet spot apart and there, installing his statue in the cavity of a tree, he knelt before it in prayer for long hours at a time. Sometimes, in order to get rid of distractions, he confided his flock to the care of one of the steadiest of his companions—for whom he would promise to do the same service some other time—and sought the most retired place he could find, hiding himself among the bushes and high grass, so as to be able to satisfy his love of prayer without fear of interruption.

We have visited with interest and reverence the scenes amid which the earliest years of our Saint were passed. Many an hour did we spend in rambles over the ground so often trodden by the feet of the little shepherd, in contemplation of the peaceful landscape and in reflection on the immense influence exerted on man by his surroundings. It is his homeland that makes a man what he eventually becomes. He grows to see things with her eyes, to hear them through her ears ; all her ideals become his ;

and his most cherished memories are those connected with her. This influence of man by his surroundings almost seems to be a law of the Creator. The human race would appear to have been distributed over the face of the earth, in order that everything thereon might be at once a witness and a prayer to Him by whose will they came into existence.

Meditating thus, we came to admire more and more, and almost to venerate, all we saw ; and to exclaim : " It was here, then, O God of the poor, the humble and the feeble ; it was in this unknown corner of the world, that this child lived alone with Thee, Thy angels, and the works of Thy hand. It was from among these bushes where he prayed, that it seemed good to Thee to cause this priest, this apostle, this man after Thine own heart, to arise. It was here that Thou didst train him for Thy service, during the disorders of those terrible times, far from the two-fold stream of anarchy and impiety which inundated France and covered her face with ruins. It was here that he was peacefully prepared by Thee to become one of the glories of Thy Church. When he rose from his knees to return to his little flock, he left Thy presence bearing in his heart the spirit of poverty, humility, gentleness, sacrifice and the germs of all we saw later develop into sanctity." And it seemed to us, as if there came from everything we beheld, an odour of purity and love of God which imparted a fragrance to the very atmosphere of the place.

One day, when our little shepherd was no more than seven, he took his ass laden with corn to the mill at St. Didier, accompanied by Marion Vincent, a little girl of about the same age as himself. The day was very hot ; and the two children halted to rest in the shade of a hollow tree. There, their infant prattle became more confidential :—

" I think," began Jean-Marie, " that we two would get on very well together."

" Yes," agreed Marion, " and if our parents approve, we might get married one of these days."

" Oh ! as far as I am concerned," replied Jean-Marie earnestly, " do not think of it : never speak of it again."*

Had this child already heard the voice of the Holy Spirit calling him and revealing to him the joys of sacrifice and the glory of virginity ; making him understand the nothingness and emptiness of earthly things and the value of those of heaven ? It is quite certain that, even at this tender age, all his thoughts appeared to be concentrated on the desire to serve God and attach himself to Him alone.

Next to Almighty God, Jean-Marie loved the poor. Love of God and love of the poor usually go together : for God loves the

*Marion Vincent lived quite near the Vianney family : and it was she herself who, while turning her distaff before her door, gave us the details of this innocent idyl.

poor ; and how can one love God without loving what He loves ? That wonderful charity, which afterwards became a part of his life, already burned in his infant heart. In him the heart absorbed all other faculties ; nor does he seem to have been remarkable at this age for graces of understanding and gifts of intellect. But his gifts of heart amply compensated for those others which were withheld from him : in him was seen, not reason, but impulsive kindness ; nothing brilliant, but all that was noble and generous ; no theory, but abundant action : nothing was calculated, but everything was simple and spontaneous.

We have already seen that the house of the Vianney family was an ever-open asylum for the poor ; and it was by no means exceptional to find as many as twenty in the barn at one time.

(Note by Translator :—Such a number, at one time and constantly, would appear to amount to a quite impossible total in a year ; but, as we learn from de Tocqueville, the poor suffered from great abuses at that time. For example : “ These peasants commonly received certain wages, but they were arbitrarily fixed and low I have found, under the date of 1770, letters from several parish priests, who propose to tax the great land-owners, both clerical and lay, ‘ who possess vast estates which they do not inhabit, and from which they draw large revenues to be spent elsewhere.’ At all times the villages were infested with beggars ; for, as Letrone observes, the poor were relieved in the towns, but in the country, during the winter, mendicity was their only resource. Occasionally these poor wretches were treated with great violence. In 1767, the Duc de Choiseul, then Minister, resolved suddenly to suppress mendicity in France. The correspondence of the Intendants still shows with what rigour his measures were taken. The patrol was ordered at once to take up all beggars found in the kingdom ; and it is said that more than 50,000 of them were seized. Able-bodied vagabonds were to be sent to the galleys ; as for the rest, more than forty workhouses were opened to receive them. It would have been more to the purpose to have opened the hearts of the rich.” *France before the Revolution of 1789*, pp. 161–2–3.)

These poor people arrived at night-fall ; and when it was cold Matthew Vianney took care to have a large fire lit in the kitchen to warm them. A huge pot of potatoes was put on ; and these the children of the family shared with the poor and at the same table. After supper, night prayers were said in common ; and then the master of the house conducted his guests to the hay-loft or the cellar, being careful to see that they were warm enough and wanted for nothing. Meanwhile his wife swept out the kitchen and removed all traces—often only too apparent—of the miserable state to which the unfortunate people had been reduced.

We mentioned in the Introduction that Benedict Joseph Labre was one of those whom our Lord sent to ask the hospitality of

Pierre Vianney.* This fact admits of no doubt : the memory of his stay at Dardilly is treasured by the neighbourhood, and especially by the Vianneys, who feel that they were honoured by his presence under their roof ; and there is nobody in the village who has not heard of it. Jean-Marie was much consoled and inspired by the remembrance of it ; and later, when he went to the Lesser Seminary at Verrières, used to talk of it to his fellow-students—as one of them, the Abbé Ballet, a Missionary of Lyons, told us. M. Vianney, he said, had had an autograph letter of Blessed Benedict Joseph in his possession, and very much regretted that he had parted with it. And, when at Ars, the good Curé delighted to tell the story in his catechisms.

Jean-Marie was never so happy as when helping his parents in this Christian hospitality. He brought in every beggar who fell in his way—once he managed to collect no less than twenty-four of them. Some of these had companions in misfortune—boys and girls of his own age or even younger. The children were always his special care. He brought them to the fire, one after another, beginning with the smallest. He obtained anything that was left from his parents' table and distributed it among them, adding all he could manage to save from his own supper. Then he looked over their clothes and went to beg from his mother, whose kind heart he well knew, on their behalf—trousers for one, a shirt for another, a jacket for a third, shoes for someone else, and so on. Having thus paved the way, he came to that which was nearest his heart—the care of their souls. When he had to do with children like himself he would teach them the *Pater Noster*, *Ave Maria* and the Acts of Faith, Hope and Charity. Then he would go on to the principal Truths of Religion ; and tell them they must be very good, love the good God with all their heart, never complain of their lot, but bear their hardships with patience in view of the life to come. Although he discreetly addressed himself to the children, he was listened to by their elders with an interest that soon became admiration. When they left, in the morning, everyone invoked blessings on his head ; but as his charity was not inspired by the desire of thanks or praise, but solely by the wish to serve that Lord whom he saw in His poor, he would escape as quickly as possible from this chorus of commendation.

Such was, in his earliest years, this holy man, for whom his Master destined so glorious a career in His service. Many and great graces were showered upon him even at this time ; but they were by way of preparation—that morning dew with which the Creator oftentimes refreshes His creatures, to the end that, later on, they may be able to sustain the burden and heat of the day.

* Father of Matthew Vianney.

CHAPTER III

THE TROUBLES OF CATHOLICS DURING THE FRENCH REVOLUTION. FIRST COMMUNION OF JEAN-MARIE. HIS WORK IN THE FIELDS. HIS VIRTUES AND LOVE OF PRAYER

And in his servants he will take pleasure. (II. Mach. vii., 6.)

And she (Wisdom) flourished as a grape soon ripe. (Ecclus. li., 19.)

The wind that rises with the dawn lasts longer than that which gets up during the night. . . . These first movements of grace seem to me to have been like this morning breeze. (Life of St. Elizabeth. R. P. Apollinaire.)

THE precocious virtue of Jean-Marie seems the more wonderful when viewed in the light of the deplorable religious conditions of of those days. Of him also it can be said with truth : that he advanced in wisdom and age, before God and man ; and that he was as a lily among thorns.

At that time France was being bereft of her clergy ; and in a few months the process was so complete that public worship had all but ceased. And she might have become an entirely Godless nation, had not the faith of a few induced them to keep up the practices of religion in the privacy of their homes, and, when possible, in some place of worship—which last, however, were few and far between. As there were no longer any priests, good old men, pious lay-folk, or nuns driven from their convent, would read the Prayers for Mass and announce days of Obligation, fasting or abstinence—at which times, other men would mount guard at the entrance of the village, to give warning of the approach of anyone bent on persecution.

Only a very few faithful priests contrived to remain in the country ; and they were hunted like wild beasts—travelling where and how they could, under every sort of disguise ; or concealed in barns or the depths of woods. Sometimes they were able to offer the Holy Sacrifice in the dead of night and administer the sacraments but it was at the risk of their lives.

“Constitutional” priests were seldom met with ; and, in places where they happened to be, such as Dardilly, public opinion held them in such disfavour that they led lives of almost complete isolation.* Their congregations consisted, for the most part, of

* In 1790, the French Assembly constituted the Church as a subordinate Department of State. On 27th November a decree was issued stipulating that all bishops and priests should, within a week, take the oath of fidelity to the Constitution, under pain of deprivation. Those who refused but remained at their posts were to be proceeded against. Thenceforth there were two classes of priests : the non-jurors who were faithful to Rome ; and the Constitutional priests, or *jureurs*, who had consented to take the oath.—TRANSLATOR.

public officials, their own servants, and some few indifferent souls who, from force of habit, could no more keep away from the church on Sunday than from the cabaret on days of *décadi*.* These latter, then, went to church and under their breath asked pardon of God the while for assisting at the services of a *jureur*. Good Catholics like the Vianneys and the Beluses, never attended—preferring a long walk to Écully, or elsewhere, to hear the Mass of a faithful priest.

However, the events of 9th Thermidor† abated the violence of the persecution somewhat and people once again breathed freely. On the one hand, the fury of the Revolution was spent : on the other, the courage of the people, disciplined by the struggle, had re-asserted itself. So, thanks to a reluctant and precarious toleration, sundry proscribed priests re-appeared, but only with many precautions. The village of Écully was known to be well-affected towards religion ; and to this good reputation it had, since the beginning of May, 1794, owed the privilege of giving clandestine hospitality to several priests both secular and regular, as well as two nuns. These brave men were : M. Balley, Canon of the church of Ste Geneviève ; M. Royer, Director and M. Chaillou, Bursar of the Greater Seminary at Lyons, and both of them distinguished members of the Congregation of St. Sulpice ; together with the Abbé Groboz, afterwards private secretary to Cardinal Fesch. The nuns were Sisters Deville and Combet, of the Institute of St. Charles. These pious women—like so many others—were a standing reproof to the revolutionaries ; for they proved the baselessness of those fables, inspired by the malevolent and accepted by the credulous, in which anti-religious writers bestowed on them an insulting and contemptuous pity—affecting to regard them as victims of worn-out prejudice groaning under the weight of intolerable tyranny. For, instead of taking advantage of the new laws,‡ they persevered in their holy vocation, continuing to observe their Rule as far as possible, and by their generous constancy they gave a testimony as honourable to themselves as it was to religion. They were of the greatest possible assistance during that difficult time ; for it was they who organised and directed the action of the faithful.

There must also be mentioned the efforts of several excellent

* *Décadi* was the official day of rest established by the National Convention in 1792. It fell on every tenth day, and was to be substituted for Sunday.—TRANSLATOR.

† On the 9th Thermidor (27th July), 1794, occurred the *Coup d'État*, which resulted in the execution of Robespierre and others, the suppression of the Paris Commune, and the disappearance of the Revolutionary Tribunal. The persecution relaxed in practice, though the anti-religious laws were not repealed. Many priests were released from prison and many of those exiled returned.—TRANSLATOR.

‡ On 13th February, 1790, the French Assembly had issued a decree, refusing to recognise monastic vows and abolishing religious congregations.

families of Écully and Dardilly, who formed secret associations for arranging religious services and also undertook the care and maintenance of the missionary priests. With boundless ingenuity, untold sacrifices and sometimes much danger to themselves, they secured the safety and incognito of these fearless Confessors of the Faith. Ever anxious to hear the Word of God, receive the sacraments and assist at Mass, they assembled in the woods or at remote farms, regardless of weather or distance. Occasionally, they stationed scouts along the roads; and having thus made matters comparatively safe, the congregation ventured to sing and even carry out the Offices of the Church with a solemnity that recalled the happier days of the past. This aroused much enthusiasm: the older people would weep at the remembrance; while it caused the stout-hearted and devout—such are always to be found and their number increases under persecution—to be more attached than ever to their proscribed religion to which, the mystery attending the proceedings, the fact of danger faced and duty fulfilled in the very teeth of the obstacles and threats of an impious law, all combined to lend new charms. The women were especially delighted at the revival of all these practices of piety, which have ever appealed to the heart of “the devout sex.”

Jean-Marie’s mother was always present at these gatherings and was often accompanied by her little son. One day, M. Groboz noticed the child and, impressed by his air of modesty and recollection, greeted him kindly, asking how old he might be. “Eleven,” replied Jean-Marie. “And how long is it since your last confession?” “I have never yet made one.” “Never!” exclaimed the Abbé and, at his desire, the boy made his first confession then and there. Evidently M. Groboz must have found his penitent well prepared, for he prevailed on Madame Vianney to leave the child with his grandparents at Écully, so that he could attend the instructions for First Communion more easily.

The duties of catechists were performed by the two nuns mentioned above and so well did they carry them out, and so attractive did their instructions become, that parents came to the classes as well as the children, overjoyed to receive once more those aids to religion of which they had so long been deprived. Jean-Marie having been particularly recommended to their good offices, the Sisters took special pains in his regard—pains amply repaid by the example he set his companions. In fact, his fervour was so very evident, that it sometimes excited their jealousy: “Look at that little Vianney,” they would say, “he wants to be more angelic than the angels themselves.”

The candidates for First Communion passed from the care of the nuns to that of the missionaries; who assembled them, now in one house, now in another, but always at night, to avoid aroun-

sing the suspicions of the republican police. Several worthy families lent their houses for these gatherings, among whom were the Pingeons, the Margarons and the Mièvres—names held in benediction in their vicinity and deserving of lasting remembrance for their services to the cause of religion.

It is not absolutely certain where and when Jean-Marie made his First Communion. Several people of whom we made enquiries assert that he did so in 1799, and at the house of the Comte de Pigeon—now the home of the Bret family : so that seems the most probable place. As to the time : the Curé of Ars used to recall the fact that it was during harvest-time, in a shed, temporarily used as a chapel ; and that several wagons, loaded with hay, were drawn up before the entrance, no doubt with the object of averting the curiosity of evil-disposed persons.

All these exceptional circumstances—which have prevented our learning more than the mere fact of the ceremony itself—must have added to the solemnity of the occasion in the heart of the youthful communicant, and caused it to be one of the most memorable of his life. The altar before which his parents and a few trusted friends knelt, was usually set up in a barn or in some upper room. The Holy Sacrifice was offered in the silent hour before dawn. There was, in the precautions necessary to disarm the suspicions of the unfriendly, together with the mystery in which all the preliminaries of the great day were enshrouded, an air reminiscent of the catacombs. The soul of the boy must have been more than ordinarily stirred within him : and the circumstances attending this first participation in the bread of the strong, in such times of trial and apostasy as these, must have left a mark not easily effaced. If it is the case that the blossoms of the time of First Communion generally foreshadow the fruits of riper years, assuredly the heart of the saintly child Vianney must have been a veritable sanctuary for his divine Lord that day.

Of all God's creatures, none is more lovable and attractive than a young man devoted to his religion—especially when, by the help of divine grace, he has preserved his innocence and purity of heart. His affections and desires concentrate themselves on Him who is the source of all good ; this love of God is reflected in his tenderness and devotion to the parents God has given him and it is diffused on all around him by his amiability and charity. Ever ready to serve, he is happy in being able to give pleasure to others, he treats all with respect and confidence, he is simple and candid in his dealings, and induces a feeling of cheerfulness and tranquillity in his presence. And such was the impression made by Jean-Marie when he returned to his family ; for his outward demeanour bore witness to the beauty of the soul within. That grace, which had prevented him from his cradle, had increased with years ; and he had, even now, disciples among his little friends. Leading the life of an angel, he passed direct from igno-

rance of evil to its detestation. We have heard the Curé of Ars say: "When I was young, I knew nothing about evil; I have only learned to know it from the lips of sinners in the confessional."

His sister, Marguerite, gives the following account of her brother:—

"Our mother had such confidence in the obedience of Jean-Marie that, when any of us showed unwillingness or hesitation in carrying out her wishes, her invariable resource was to ask the same thing of him, and he complied instantly. Then, turning to us once more, she would say: 'Look at him; he makes no difficulties about doing what I want, but sets about it at once.'

"Usually he worked in the fields with the rest of the family. So long as they were all together, he did his share conscientiously, as far as his strength allowed, and everyone was satisfied; but, one day when he and Francis were sent to work in the vineyard by themselves, he over-exerted himself by attempting to keep pace with Francis, who thought that, being the older of the two, he ought to do the most work. In the evening, poor Jean-Marie complained to his mother that Francis worked so fast that he could not keep up with him. 'Francis,' said she, 'go a little slower; or, better still, help your brother a little, now and then.' 'But,' replied Francis, 'he can't be expected to do as much as I. What would people say, if the elder brother did no more than the younger one?'

"Next day, a nun, who had been driven from her convent by the fury of the Revolution, gave Jean-Marie, for whom she had a great regard on account of his piety, a little statuette of our Lady, enclosed in a cylindrical case which could be opened and shut at pleasure.

"This present was very opportune; and my brother felt sure that he now possessed a remedy against the activity of Francis. Next time they went to the vineyard together, he placed it a few paces in front of him, before beginning work. As he advanced towards it, he prayed to the Blessed Virgin to help him keep up with his brother. Arrived at the statuette, he picked it up, placed it further off, resumed his mattock, prayed, worked on, and now kept in line with Francis, who tried in vain to get ahead of him. When they got home that night, Francis remarked, with some vexation, that the Blessed Virgin had helped his brother to do as much work as himself. Our mother, like the wise and prudent woman she was, smiled, but said nothing, for fear of giving rise to self-love in her child."

Work in the fields, hard and laborious though it was—never absorbed Jean-Marie to such a degree as to withdraw him from prayer. Like a host who does the honours of his domain, God is ever at the side of a pure soul, in the contemplation of the works of His almighty hand. And, just as the value of a gift is enhanced when it comes from the hand of a friend, so all things assume a

spiritual aspect to a soul in union with God ; and, even in the smallest things—more especially those which, rising above what is merely useful, belong rather to the order of the beautiful—he beholds the overflowing beneficence of Him who is all-loving, and made and placed them here to delight the heart of man.

Jean-Marie learned, day by day, to understand more and more the lesson taught by the visible universe. The evidences of the greater world beyond, in which the beautiful land of his birth abounds, awakened within him the most lively feelings of love and gratitude towards the God of heaven. If he could not—as in the days of his infancy—betake himself to the presence of his Master on the altar ; he could adore Him in the marvels of His wisdom and power in the visible heavens which declare the glory of God. And thus, our Lord, ignored in the land and cast out of His own churches, has always found faithful souls who, in their solitude, render to Him the homage which is denied elsewhere.

“ When I was alone, mattock and spade in hand,” the Curé of Ars often said, “ I prayed aloud ; when I was in company, I prayed under my breath.” This shows thoughtfulness, very remarkable in a child of thirteen ; he shrank from intruding even his prayers upon others, or giving them any occasion to resent his piety. Real goodness is ever thus : always discreet, never importunate ; and recognises that good should be accomplished in such a manner that it may not only be pleasing to God but also commend itself to man.

“ If, now that I have to look after the souls of others,” he added, “ I only had time to see to my own and for prayer and meditation, as I had when I worked in my father’s fields, how happy I should be ! There was always some leisure in those days ; we rested after dinner, before setting to work again. I used to lie on the ground like the rest and pretended to sleep, but I was praying with all my heart. Ah ! it was a happy time.”

“ How happy I was,” he repeated, less than a month before his death, “ when I only had my three sheep and my ass to look after. Poor little grey ass ! he was well-nigh thirty years old when we lost him. I could pray easily enough then : I had not a broken head as I have now—my prayer was just like the water in a brook, which has only to follow its course.”

A premature wisdom had shown this child—so new to life, so advanced in perfection already—a truth of which many who think themselves very enlightened are ignorant : that is, that the kingdom of God is within us ; and that, without quitting our own sphere of action—however humble it may be—we have within our grasp the best and surest means of salvation, in carrying out the duties of the state to which we are called. All perfection lies there—and for everyone. God considers the intention, not the result : He does not consider so much what we do, as how and for whom we do it. What is a cup of cold water in the scheme of

the universe? Yet, given to a poor man, it may be the price of eternity. The life of a Christian is made up of seemingly insignificant actions which, taken together, make up the whole duty of man.

Jean-Marie understood that, "He does much who loves much. He does much who does well what he does." (Imitation I. i., ch. 15) Going to his work, or returning from it, he always prayed. If he fell in with children of his own age, he would invite them to accompany him and, on the way, he taught them the catechism.

One evening, when he and his elder brother were going home from the vineyard in company with several other labourers, he dropped a few paces behind the rest and took out his rosary. One of the vine-dressers, speaking to Francis but evidently talking at Jean-Marie, remarked, scoffingly: "And you, aren't you going to mumble *paternosters* with your brother?" Francis blushed a little uneasily; but our generous child, nothing disconcerted, went on quietly with his prayers without reply.

Although the work was very hard for him, considering his age, in the evening, he would set to work by candle-light, to study the catechism, the gospels, and his prayers. When he had got them by heart, he would begin to meditate on them; nor would he cease until he was overcome by sleep. Games, which those of his age usually consider not only a right but a necessity, had no attractions for him. In fact, we heard from two of his contemporaries—cousins—that they never saw Jean-Marie "play." The one distraction of his leisure was to fashion little clay figures of priests and nuns, or candlesticks and altars surrounded by worshippers. Though he set some store by these, there were occasions when he was always ready to give them away. For instance: when he heard that a Mass was to be celebrated somewhere near, his first impulse was to run off and assist at it. If a remark were made, that he ought to go to work instead, he would yield the point; but his disappointment was evident. Then, somebody would promise to do his work for him, on condition of receiving a present of his "little saints," which he would hand over on the spot and betake himself to Mass as quickly as possible. There he might be seen, body motionless and eyes cast down, kneeling in a corner in profound contemplation. His devotion was so sensible that he would often shed abundant tears. Mass ended, he would go to kneel for a moment before the statue of our Lady, and then happily back to work.

Sometimes, during his absence, one of the others would amuse himself by hiding away his tools. Jean-Marie took the joke in good part; then, looking at the faces of his companions, he would single out the practical-joker at once; thank him gracefully for his kindness in taking care of his things, and promise to do the same for him some other day. And by his gentleness and engaging manners he became a favourite with them all.

The reminiscences of his early days, passed in agricultural labour, were always cherished by the Curé of Ars. He returned willingly to them, in those moments of affectionate confidence which were natural to him : " When I was young, I tilled the soil ; I am not ashamed of it ; I am nothing but an ignorant husbandman. When working with my mattock, I often used to say to myself : ' This is the way you should cultivate your soul ; first root out the weeds, and thus prepare it to receive the good seed of the good God.' "

It was thus that his humility prompted him to speak of himself ; but there had never been any weeds to root out in that soul where simplicity, integrity and purity seemed to spring up of themselves and bear fruit without effort—the spontaneous products of a saintly nature.

CHAPTER IV

THE RESTORATION OF PUBLIC WORSHIP IN FRANCE. JEAN-MARIE VIANNEY COMMENCES HIS STUDIES WITH THE CURÉ OF ÉCULLY

And he shall be like a tree which is planted near the running waters, which shall bring forth its fruit in due season. (Ps. i., 3.)

MEANWHILE God had arisen and judged His cause and once more had His promises been fulfilled; and once more did Christians repeat those words of the Psalmist, which seem to have been designed to convince persecutors in every age of their own impotence: "Why have the Gentiles raged, and the people devised vain things? . . . He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh at them: and the Lord shall deride them." (Ps. ii., 1, 4.)

The Catholics of France, after having seen their sanctuaries overturned, their altars profaned and their priests proscribed and slaughtered, were overjoyed at being once more free to worship Almighty God. Their delight none can understand fully, save those who have suffered in like manner. A great writer, disgusted by the excesses of the period, of which he had once shared the enthusiasm, thus apostrophises the revolutionaries: "Insensate despoilers! you raised shouts of victory: where is your victory now? To-day, nothing remains for you but to rage at the spectacle of the multitudes who throng to fill our churches. Those churches have been pillaged, but they are still holy; they are bare, but they scarce suffice to contain their congregations; external splendour has vanished, but internal splendour takes its place: no longer do people befoul the marbles and the hangings, but they fall down and weep over the destruction that has been wrought; the material surroundings of the Sacrifice are poor, but the adoration is profound and the piety sincere." (La Harpe.)

After the events of 18th Brumaire (10th November, 1799—the date of Bonaparte's *Coup d'État*), the revolutionaries realised that they had found their master. The First Consul no doubt imagined he had done great things for the Church, by restoring—under much restraint and with many precautions—that liberty wherein consists her life and strength; by re-opening such churches as the Revolution had spared; and by giving back to her, under the name of public subsidy, a fraction of the vast possessions of former days. But the essential necessity remained untouched—a necessity beyond the power of a First Consul to meet—the reconstitution of the Christian France of times past and the undoing of the ruin that ten years of social and religious anarchy had effected in the souls of her children. The salvation

of souls is a work impossible of achievement by conquerors and statesmen : their part is, if they do their duty, to assist and encourage ; but the work itself can only be accomplished by the agency of the Catholic priesthood. Holy priests : that is the pressing need of religion in every age ; but at what period of her history had this need been more urgent than at the end of a crisis which had depopulated the sanctuary by exile and death ? True, the churches were once more open ; but under their cold and silent arches the faithful waited, often in vain, for that living word which alone can make the dry bones live : while numberless priestless parishes and others served by " Constitutionals " of the revolutionary regime, or by very young priests, attested the spiritual destitution to which the Church of France had been reduced.

The parish of Écully was one of the first to reap the benefit of the new order of things ; and what rejoiced the inhabitants still more was, that Mgr. de Méroville—who had been commissioned to re-organise the diocese of Lyons in the name of Cardinal Fesch—conceived the happy idea of recognising the devotion of this congregation, by placing at their head one of those Confessors of the Faith to whom they had given shelter during the times of persecution.

The Abbé Charles Balley took possession of the cure of Écully towards the middle of February, 1803. From his first day in the parish, he was received with veneration by every family, rich and poor, far and near ; for his virtues, learning and high character had inspired all with respect and confidence. He was well-known in Lyons also ; for it was in that city he had lived during the Reign of Terror, concealed in the Rue Saint-Jean and maintained by sundry devoted families—especially that of M. Loras. It was in the house of this gentleman that he eluded the agents of the republican police, when the investigations of the Committee of Public Safety took a more energetic turn. M. Loras had learned to appreciate the great soul of the holy priest ; and, when he received news of his nomination to the cure of Écully, begged him to take charge of the education of his sons—one of whom afterwards became Bishop of Dubuques. No request could have been more welcome to M. Balley ; for he was devoted to young people and delighted to have them about him. Indeed, his first idea when he became Curé had been to make his presbytery an auxiliary to the Lesser Seminaries of the diocese and a training-ground for priests.

Happy the pastor who understands that one of the simplest and most useful works for the Church is to discover vocations to the priesthood and to cultivate and develop the beginnings of such in the children under his care. A good priest who owes to him, or to anyone else, the means of following his vocation, is the first link in a long chain of good works which, for the greater glory of God and the welfare and salvation of souls, will continue to lengthen, even to the end of the world. It has been said of the

great Bishop of Milan, that his greatest work was that illustrious Doctor of the Church, St. Augustine. In like manner, it may be said that, one of the best works—perhaps the very best of them—in the apostolic career of M. Balley, was to have discovered and fostered the vocation of the Curé of Ars.

Preparation for First Communion—often long delayed by lack of regular and continuous instruction—was also one of the first cares of the newly-appointed Curé. He revived the catechetical instructions: his influence transformed every house into a Christian home, where the children received the elements of religious doctrine from the lips of their parents; and he completed in the church what had been commenced beside the domestic hearth. But it was in the pulpit, principally, that he gave vent to his consuming zeal, and his whole saintly soul was revealed in sermons, in which his hearers knew not which to admire most, the knowledge which enlightened, the unction which penetrated, or the devotion which inspired them.

Thus the days of trial and mourning of the Church in France were forgotten. Recalled from the deserts and obscurity where, to the great spiritual privation of all, the faithful had been constrained to hide Him, our Lord returned, promising pardon and scattering benedictions, to the sanctuary of His love in the peace of the holy tabernacles; once more did He ascend the same altars from which He had blessed their forefathers, and once more did He behold His much-tried children kneeling at His feet on Sundays and festivals, as they had been wont to do in days of yore.

The Vianney family, who had always been closely connected with Écully, were not slow to appreciate and take advantage of their newly-restored spiritual privileges; but none of them rejoiced so much as our Jean-Marie. Since the very first day he had been at Écully, there had been no religious ceremony, no Mass or Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, at which he had not assisted. Distance was no obstacle: what mattered a league? At such times he would have gone ten, only to hear a Mass. . . . "Will you allow me to go to Écully, to-day?" he would ask his father, when the latter was unwell, "I will say so many *Paters* and *Aves* that you may get better."

Intimate relations were not slow to be established between the new Curé and the saintly youth of Dardilly. As M. Balley attracted the affection and respect of his parishioners so it was with their souls. The mere sight of the holy priest at the altar made such an impression on the young Vianney that he longed to know him; and the first effect of the interview that followed was to fan the flame of that grace which had long since been lighted in his soul. Young though he was, he had already much experience of the evils of the times and the grave injuries they had caused to religion; and, having in M. Balley an example of one who had himself suffered in the struggle, he conceived a vehement desire

to devote himself to the service of the Church in her hour of need. From this time onward, he began to see more clearly that his place was to be in the ranks of the priesthood and his life's work to labour for the good of souls. He saw, too, that the needs of this same priesthood—for which the world has often nothing but the Crown of Thorns which encircled the head of the first Priest—called for fresh apostles; and this call, in appealing to the love and courage with which his soul overflowed, silenced the scruples raised by his humility, in view of the merit of the sacrifice and the generosity it would require.

From his earliest years, he had regarded the priesthood as the culminating point of an earthly career and perhaps vaguely hoped that such a career might be for him. Then it was no more than an instinct; now it was a vocation. At the age of eighteen, a generous soul only seeks to give itself without measure; and asks no more of heaven or earth than a worthy cause which it can serve worthily. If this be so in the case of a soul, generous and good in the merely natural order, how much more is it true of one in which nature and grace flow together in two virgin streams, of which not a drop has been wasted in the vain passions and desires of this world. "If I were a priest," said the young Vianney, "what a multitude of souls I would gain for the good God."

His First Communion had but strengthened his good desires; and he had mentioned them to his parents; but it must be admitted that he chose his time badly. The misfortunes which beset the Church seemed to be in no way nearing their end. Pius VI. had recently died at Valence: and, to those who had no faith in the reality of the promise made to St. Peter, it appeared that, with his death, the papacy was to become extinct. The outlook at the moment was darker than ever. And this being so, to part with their son at an age when he was becoming so useful, and encourage him to embark on a career so uncertain, did not commend itself to Matthew Vianney and his wife as a wise and prudent course to pursue. And so, without actually combatting the proposal, they agreed to postpone its execution until more propitious times.

What then did the young Vianney do? Precisely what he afterwards advised those to do, who were in similar circumstances: he confided the care of his vocation to God in prayer; and meanwhile he obeyed the wishes of his parents. He was told to wait and he waited; perfectly assured that the will of God would be manifested sooner or later and that, when that time arrived, God would provide means to carry it into effect. Thus, where the vision of the worldly-minded becomes clouded and their wisdom fails them, simple faith finds easy issue from its difficulties.

The battle of Marengo (which brought about peace with Austria), and the Concordat of 1801 which followed it, had seemed to

indicate that divine Providence had better times in store for the Church in France. Jean-Marie now thought that he ought to take advantage of this improved state of affairs. He had never ceased to nurse his project in secret ; and directly he made the acquaintance of the new Curé of Écully he felt impelled to take counsel with him. And this saintly man was the agent appointed by God, to open for the boy the gate of an apostolic career and conduct him whithersoever his vocation called him.

We are told in Holy Scripture, of a certain young man : " And Jesus looking on him, loved him." (Mark x., 21.) M. Balley, who was well accustomed to read the human heart, did the same with respect to Jean-Marie. He encouraged him to persevere in his resolution and added : " Reassure yourself, my friend ; I will do everything in my power to help you." It needed no more than this to induce the boy's parents to yield the point ; there was now no reason for opposition, and the attitude of M. Balley overcame any lingering hesitation they might have felt. In a few days all the necessary preparations were made and the new scholar was installed in the house of his mother's relations at Écully. Such was the esteem in which he was held, that the inhabitants of Dardilly wished to contribute towards the expense of his education, and were only withheld from actually making the offer by fear of hurting the feelings of his family. However, the honour—for so it was regarded—of co-operation in the good work could not be denied to everybody. Madame Bibost, a pious widow of Écully, asked and obtained the favour of being allowed to wash his linen gratuitously and look after his wardrobe. She made these services an excuse for paying him little visits now and then ; and declared that, every time she did so, she found some new matter for edification.

We have visited the little farm of *Point-du-Jour* which, for two years, sheltered the budding virtues of the servant of God, and was the silent witness of his efforts to attain to perfection. There it was that he increased day by day in the knowledge and love of Him for whose service he was preparing himself : there, as at Dardilly, neither sight nor sound of evil found place : and there it was that he made rapid progress in piety and virtue—the divine blessing on constant fidelity to graces bestowed.

Whether it arose from the difficulties of the times in which his childhood was passed, or whether his parents had had other designs for his future, certain it is that Jean-Marie had arrived at the age when most young men have completed their classical studies, knowing nearly nothing. Such a discovery might have daunted some, but it did not discourage his master in the least. He knew nearly nothing, did we say ? Well, he could hardly follow the Latin of the breviary : but, after all, the highest and most useful knowledge is that spoken of by A Kempis : " To have no opinion of ourselves, and to think always well and commendably of others, is great wisdom and high perfection." (Imi-

tation I., ch. ii.) He whose Spirit "breatheth where he will," (John iii., 8) had inculcated this lesson, and Jean-Marie had laid it well to heart; he had learned of Him to be "meek and humble of heart," (Matt. xi., 29) and to carry to the foot of the Cross the troubles of his daily life. He had graduated in the same school as the saints of old—that of meditation, silence and obscurity.

It seemed as though God had determined to render any temptation to vain-glory impossible in His servant, and also to root out any self-love that may have remained; for He permitted him to encounter every kind of obstacle in his attempts to follow his vocation, and some of them may well have seemed insurmountable. His mind worked slowly, his memory was poor, and his progress hardly noticeable. His excellent master, far from losing patience and scolding, helped, consoled, and endeavoured to inspire him with a little self-confidence.

Sometimes the poor boy felt entirely incapable of further effort; weariness claimed him for her own, he became unsettled and asked permission to go to see his parents. M. Balley gently refused, for he felt that if he allowed him to leave in such a state of depression his vocation might be endangered. "Why should you go?" he asked, "your parents, seeing the futility of your work and their own sacrifices, will be only too glad to keep you at home. Then, all our plans will come to nothing: farewell to the priesthood and the salvation of souls." These words recalled the young man to himself, his work and his resolutions; and always led to redoubled application on his part, which Almighty God did not leave unrewarded.

Here we find in the notes gathered together by Catherine Lassagne—who was one of the original directresses of the *Providence* at Ars and always the discreet confidante of her Curé; and whose reminiscences have aided us so much in our attempts to describe the holy man—a characteristic page, such as are only met with in the lives of saints. Jean-Marie seems to have had one of those sudden inspirations which are quite out of the ordinary course and seem to come direct from above; and which, when one has the courage to follow them, cause the difficulties in the way of a life of mortification and sacrifice to cease.

Finding himself entirely destitute of those abilities without which he could never hope for success in his studies; our young man bethought himself of resorting to supernatural means to overcome the obstacles to his progress. After taking the advice of his confessor, he made a vow to go, on foot and begging his way, to the tomb of St. John Francis Regis; to implore the intercession of the apostle of le Vivarais on his own behalf, and to obtain the grace of sufficient facility to enable him, like the Saint, to become a good and faithful labourer in the vineyard of the Lord. He set out; but, as Catherine's notes attest, he had very much to

bear and often found himself refused the shelter that charity usually gives to the humblest beggar. Because he had not the appearance of a poor man, he was taken for a rogue and vagabond. When he arrived at la Louvesc he was forced to get his vow commuted; and instead of returning begging his bread from door to door, he paid his own expenses—using the money with which he had provided himself by way of precaution. But he made the long pilgrimage entirely on foot.

Such generosity in meeting these incessant trials deserved to be rewarded: and it was rewarded—his prayers were heard. St. John Francis Regis, to whom in his gratitude he afterwards vowed special devotion, obtained from God the much-needed grace; and to such a degree that both his master and those who had before despaired of his success were astonished. From that date onwards, his difficulties vanished as if by magic; the fruit of the tree of knowledge became less bitter; and the pupil, whom all had thought to be incapable, never found thereafter any difficulty in his studies that he could not overcome.

More than fifty years later, in giving an alms to a pilgrim, the Curé of Ars alluded to his own pilgrimage to la Louvesc: "It is better to give than to receive . . . I have only begged once in my life, and that was when I went to the tomb of St. John Francis Regis. I had a very bad time of it: everyone thought I was a rogue and nobody would give me either food or shelter."

The same grace that inspired this great act of faith and humility in the young Vianney, also inspired an illustrious imitator, in the person of a converted Jew, the learned theologian Liebermann, founder of the Congregation of Missionaries of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. He had just renounced the Jewish faith, and aspired to the priesthood; but insuperable difficulties presented themselves. Having no hope, save in the assistance of heaven, the idea came to him of making a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Loreto, which he carried out under the guise of a beggar. God permitted that no possible humiliation should be wanting to him: on the way he was taken for a worthless vagabond, and as such, was treated with disgrace and contumely, until the moment when, almost at the very limit of endurance but still full of devotion, he fell on his knees before the walls of the Holy House. There his soul was flooded with light; he understood the designs of the Almighty in his own regard; he saw that the obstacles to his vocation would be removed; that the honour of the priesthood was reserved for him; and he returned with a confidence in his heart that never left him afterwards.

This period of five or six years of study witnessed sundry interesting incidents, which ought not to be left unnoticed.

Jean-Marie lived, as we have already said, at the house of his mother's relatives—the Imberts, of Écully. His first care was to make certain arrangements with his cousin Marguerite (afterwards

Madame Fayolle), which were to be as the laws of the Medes and Persians which alter not. For example : his soup must be served without any sort of seasoning. "See that you pour out my soup," he told her, "before you put in any of your butter or milk ; I want neither the one nor the other." When the housekeeper carried out the agreement, she was rewarded by his satisfaction which appeared in tone and look, or the promise of some small present—a medal, an image, or a pious booklet. When she failed—as she did occasionally, by accident or design—Jean-Marie's displeasure was very evident. He became gloomy and melancholy and, as she expressed it, "ate his soup as though every mouthful was choking him."

In his new home, the young Vianney continued to be as much the friend of the poor as he had been when he lived with his parents. He could never see a case of distress without being moved to assist. Any beggars he met by the roadside, he invited to pass the night at *Point-du-Jour*. One day, going from Écully to Dardilly, he fell in with one who had no shoes. He took off his own—they were a new pair—gave them to the man, and continued his journey in bare feet. Arrived at his old home, he received a sound scolding from his father who—good man as he was and kind—was not prepared to go to such extremes of charity as his son.

Jean-Marie was quite equal to giving sound advice on occasions. One of his cousins received a letter from a friend who had recently entered a monastery. The writer was enthusiastic, and gave a glowing account of religious life. Much impressed by the description, the young man weighed the matter carefully for some days, halting between his desire of going to join his friend and his regrets at the idea of leaving an aged and infirm father and mother. Then ensued one of those struggles between the cloister and the family, which have taken place throughout the centuries and with which we are all familiar. But his parents were good Catholics ; and when they saw the perplexities to which their son was a victim, they said : "You belong to God more than you belong to us ; it is simply a question of knowing His will. Go : find your cousin, and ask his advice. He is so good and so reasonable, that we can safely abide by his decision."

∩ This was done. Jean-Marie took the letter, read it, and replied without the least hesitation : "Stay where you are, my friend ; your aged parents have need of you : help and comfort them, close their eyes at the last. Your vocation lies here."

In the absence of those more brilliant qualities which heaven had denied him, we can discern already in this pupil of the sanctuary the dawn of that clear-sightedness, that correct and stable judgment, which were later to be such striking characteristics of the Curé of Ars, and to draw around him such a multitude of souls.

CHAPTER V

HIS STUDIES ARE INTERRUPTED BY THE CONSCRIPTION. HE RETIRES INTO THE MOUNTAINS OF FOREZ

And because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee. (Tob. xii., 13.)

But thy providence, O Father, governeth it. (Wisd. xiv., 3.)

THE apprehensions which had beset the mind of the young student, on account of his lack of natural ability, were set at rest ; but greater trials awaited him. The object of trials is to make a man understand how little he is worth when left to himself. " What doth he know, that hath not been tried ? " (Ecclus. xxxiv., 9.) He knows nothing, because he has not learned to know himself. He is as gold which has not been passed through the furnace. It is therefore no matter for astonishment that we find the saints were subjected to trials throughout their lives—at the beginning, in the middle and at the end. The more exalted the state to which our Lord calls an individual soul, the greater the works He destines to accomplish through its agency, the more exacting are the proofs He demands of it.

In order that the events about to be narrated—in which we ourself have always seen the hand of divine Providence throughout—may be understood aright, it is from this spiritual point of view that they should be considered.

Were we writing the life history of an ordinary man ; were it not that every event in the wholly exceptional career we are following seems to show the evident and constant action of the divine wisdom on the saintly soul of him who confided in it so completely ; it would not be without some misgiving that we should enter upon this chapter. Some will see in the conduct of Jean-Marie a breach of the laws of his country ; others, an act of weakness which can hardly be condoned. Certainly these last must at least be convinced, by the study of his heroic life, that the man who, by a series of coincidences almost involuntary on his own part, refused to serve under a flag which was neither his own nor that of righteousness, cannot be suspected of cowardice. Even supposing his behaviour to have been blameworthy the story should still be told ; for the glory of God has never required that that the failings of the just should be concealed. The unbeliever may rejoice and scoff at them ; weaker brethren may be scandalised ; but the good Catholic will admire the intense appreciation of the reality of things which animates his holy religion. The Catholic Church never supposes her saints to be such as the stoics would have their votaries, incapable of feeling and possessed of

neither passions nor foibles. She conceives them to be such as nature made them, vacillating and fallible, but capable of redeeming by years of struggle and heroic effort the pusillanimity of a moment.

As soon as M. Balley was completely assured of his pupil's perseverance, he at once realised that, in a very few years, Jean-Marie would be amenable to the conscription. He therefore hastened to go to Lyons, in order to register the young man as an ecclesiastical student, which, as is well known, would exempt him from military service. But Almighty God permitted that, by some oversight, the requisite entry in the official books should be omitted. Three years passed and, since nothing more of the matter had been heard, everyone concluded that the formalities demanded by the law had been duly complied with. Nevertheless, when Jean-Marie had made sufficient progress in his classical studies to present himself at the examination which precedes admission to the course of philosophy, it came to light that his name was not to be found on any of the official lists. The fact of the omission, secret at first, gradually became known, and eventually reached the ears of the authorities who, without further notice, sent him a route-sheet, ordering him to go to Bayonne.

This order, as may be easily imagined, came upon the family like a thunder-bolt ; father, mother, brothers, sisters, friends and relations alike, were dismayed. Jean-Marie alone remained unmoved and tranquil ; his only concern was for the affliction of his friends. After various ineffectual attempts to get the matter rectified, his father decided to obtain a substitute, to whom he had to offer the very considerable sum of 3,000 francs (£120) ; but, two days later, the young man in question changed his mind and deposited the money and knapsack on the door-step of Matthew Vianney's house.

The effort that Jean-Marie had made to suppress his feelings was too much for him and his health gave way under the strain. The military authorities, finding that he had not reported on the appointed day, sent agents to inquire ; and these decided to move him to the hospital at Lyons. There remained nothing for the family, therefore, except to resign themselves to the departure of their Benjamin.

He entered the *Hôtel-Dieu* on 28th October, 1809, and was placed in the recruits' ward—afterwards re-named *Salle Saint-Roch*. During the fifteen days he spent there, he was visited by every member of his family and several other people ; and one and all were profoundly edified by the patience he displayed.

"Having heard of his admission to the hospital," says his worthy cousin Fayolle, at whose house, *Point-du-Jour*, he had passed his first year of study, "I went to see him next day. It was Sunday and I found him in bed with fever. The sight of me weeping seemed to keep him from doing the same. When I

seated myself by his pillow, he began to talk of the holy will of God in such beautiful and touching language that I felt happy in spite of myself. It seemed to me that, while I listened, my heart became changed and I had less difficulty in accepting as good and adorable all that it pleases God to send, although it appears very bitter to nature. He illustrated what he said by several comparisons which, although exceedingly simple, were so evidently true that they served admirably to point all he had said concerning the eternal designs of God in respect to His creatures. He added sundry arguments, the exact words of which I cannot remember ; but they consoled me so much that I felt quite calm and resigned. As the afternoon wore on, he changed the subject by inviting me to share his supper, which had now been brought in. I did what I could, and he ate a very little himself : then, seeing it was getting dark, he bade me good-night."

After fifteen days of rest and treatment, the young man was thought to be strong enough to bear the fatigue of travelling ; and on 13th November he was evacuated to Roanne. Hardly had he got half-way when, tired-out by the jolting of the cart in which he was lying, benumbed with cold and too weak to walk, he had a relapse of fever ; and there was nothing for it but to take him to the hospice at Roanne. When he recovered a little from the effects of the journey, his first thought was to write to console his parents and give them news of himself. The letter had no sooner been read at Dardilly, than everyone claimed the right of going to see him ; a privilege which fell to his eldest brother Francis, who found him quite peaceful and contented. During the succeeding six weeks, all his family went to visit him in turn, and were accompanied by friends from both the villages.

The repeated marks of esteem—almost of veneration—of which the young invalid was the object, excited, from the first, the interest of the good Augustinian Sisters who conducted the hospice ; and their interest became admiration when they heard of the wonderful faith and piety which had signalised the early youth of their patient. He soon found himself the spoilt child of the establishment. All know the noble devotion of these holy women, whose hearts are so deeply imbued with benevolence and charity : and every day witnessed some fresh mark of attention on behalf of Jean-Marie. Now it was a good book they would lend him, then they would prevail upon him to take a little old wine, anon the community-dinner would be laid under contribution and anything particularly tempting would be set aside for him. Such care speedily restored Jean-Marie to health ; and he was then ordered to join a detachment getting ready to proceed to Spain.

On the morning of the 6th January—the day appointed for the departure of the column—he went to the church to pray ; there he forgot himself, and the hour at which he should have

reported at the office of the Intendant to receive his route-sheet passed unheeded. When he appeared, he was at first met with a flat refusal, accompanied by oaths and threats. The officer completely lost his temper, and spoke of sending him in chains, from brigade to brigade, through to Bayonne. But some kind-hearted officials interposed on his behalf: "What need to use force?" they asked, "the poor boy had no intention of deserting; and he proved it by coming to report of his own accord."

Their arguments prevailed, the route-sheet was signed; and he set out—with no idea of flight, but with a strong presentiment that he would never join his corps. As he went along, rueful of countenance and sick at heart, all his aspirations for the priesthood re-asserted themselves once more, together with his repugnance to any other career and especially that of arms.

Many a time had he commiserated those unhappy young men whom war had torn from their homes, and were going forth perhaps never to return. During his stay at Roanne, he had seen others who had deserted, and were being brought back by the gendarmes. These poor fellows cursed their ill-luck, and added frightful blasphemies to the insults with which they assailed the officers of the law. The threats of Captain Blanchard recurred to his mind. The idea that he might one day find himself the associate of such men as these—he, who had hitherto found no pleasure save in the praises of God—filled him with horror.

To dissipate his gloomy forebodings he took out his rosary and had recourse to his usual comforter in time of trouble—the Blessed Virgin, whom he earnestly besought not to abandon him. The help he asked for was not long in coming for, almost at the same moment, he met by the roadside a stranger of benevolent appearance, who inquired where he was going and why he looked so sad. Jean-Marie told his story. His new acquaintance assured him that he had nothing to fear from him, and, telling him to follow, he relieved the lad of his knapsack, which was so heavy that he had only carried it with difficulty. They then left the high-road and took to the fields. Jean-Marie followed his guide without question, having no idea whither he was conducting him; but resigned to anything, "except," as he afterwards said, "to falling into the hands of the gendarmes."

For a long time they trudged on, through woods and over mountains; but always giving as wide a berth as possible to houses and beaten tracks. Jean-Marie was overpowered with fatigue; but his companion never ceased to encourage him by word and example.

Darkness came upon them, and they had halted nowhere. Then, about ten o'clock, they stopped before the door of an isolated house. The stranger knocked: a voice replied from within: the door opened and a man and woman appeared. They had both risen from bed and now came together, to see who it was that

came to seek hospitality at such a late hour. The unknown rapidly exchanged a few words with them in a low tone : then he disappeared. . . M. Vianney never saw him again ; never heard any allusion to him ; and never knew who he was.

The good people hastened to attend to the guest whom heaven had sent them. They prepared supper for him, during which the man kept him company, while his wife put clean sheets on their only bed. Jean-Marie's objections were overruled, and he occupied the bed. The worthy couple slept in the hay-loft. They were newly-married, and earned a very modest livelihood by their own work ; the husband being a maker of *sabots* (wooden shoes). On the morrow, he told his guest that, as he was a very poor man, he could not afford to keep him, nor had he sufficient work to occupy an assistant, but he would take him to a place where he would be quite safe.

Jean-Marie allowed himself to be persuaded. How could he do better than confide himself to divine Providence which had shown itself so good to him in the occurrences of the previous day ? The most far-sighted benevolence could not have disposed them to greater advantage—even supposing that human benevolence had been all that was concerned in them.

The shoemaker's house was some distance from a village called Noës, at the edge of the great forest of La Madeleine on the borders of the Departments of Loire and Allier. To this village Jean-Marie was conducted, and ushered into the presence of no less a personage than the Maire of the Commune. The situation was not without its humorous aspect—M. le Maire asked to harbour a defaulting conscript ! But, at that time, it was not such an extraordinary circumstance as it seems now. That excellent functionary raised no difficulties about playing the singular part assigned to him : he welcomed the young Vianney warmly, assured him he had nothing to fear, and that he would find a lodging for him.

There lived at Noës a good widow with a family of four children, who was as much loved as she was respected by everyone in the place. " I have known intimately many saintly men and women," the Curé of Ars used to say, in talking of his benefactress later in life, " but M. Balley and Mère Fayot were the two most beautiful souls I ever met." Perhaps gratitude had something to do with this appreciation : however, it is good to find gratitude in this world, and it does not detract from the sincerity of the avowal.

The Maire of Noës thought Jean-Marie could not do better than stay at this house, under the care of the good widow. And in fact, Claudine Fayot received the fugitive like a long-lost child. " Be quite easy in your mind, my friend," said the Maire, as he took his departure, " we will answer for your safety ; the gendarmes will never think of looking for you here. If you are alarmed

on that score, you have only to come to me and my house will be always open to you."

Nevertheless the good Maire was less confident than he affected to be; the gendarmes came everywhere, and especially to this village which, from its isolated situation, amid mountains and on the verge of a forest, was a most likely refuge for runaways. So in order to throw the agents of the law more completely off the track, he suggested that Jean-Marie should change his name to "Jérôme."

It is impossible to describe in detail all the kindness shown to Jean-Marie by his newly-adopted mother during the time he lived with her: indeed she only seemed to discriminate between him and her own children by her partiality for him. One example of her solicitude may suffice: noticing that he ate very little, she would go so far as to get up at night, to make sure that he slept soundly and had need of nothing.

The young Vianney, on his part, burned to make himself useful, so as to repay, as far as he could, the kind reception and generous hospitality he had met with. He proposed to the Maire that he should open a school; and the offer was accepted with enthusiasm. All day, thenceforward, he was occupied in instructing the children—and with such devotion, patience and assiduity, that he won universal esteem and gratitude. In the evening there was prayer in common at the house of Mère Fayot, after which, by her desire, all the children presented themselves to "M. Jérôme," and bade him an affectionate good-night before betaking themselves to bed.

Jean-Marie Fayot, the eldest of the family, we saw at Ars in 1859; and it was he who gave us most of these details. He was for eight days the room-mate of "Jérôme." When he awoke at night, he constantly surprised his companion murmuring prayers, and he recalled the fact that he seemed to be covered with crosses, medals and scapulars.

Young Vianney received Holy Communion several times during the week, despite the fact that he only went to confession once a fortnight and that the Curé of Noës was noted for the severity of his principles. He was seen to be always modest and recollected; and of such exemplary conduct and so zealous in his work that he excited great edification among the villagers. Indeed, people came from the neighbouring parishes on purpose to make his acquaintance and pray and sing hymns with him.

On the return of fine weather, the school emptied by degrees and the teacher himself went to work on the land. "No work came amiss to him," said Jean-Marie Fayot, "for he could turn his hand to anything. In harvest-time, he seemed to multiply himself somehow, in order to be as useful as possible to as many people as possible—so much so indeed, that he fell sick with inflammation of the lungs and had to keep his bed for a week or two."

The good folks at Noës came to understand that they had a treasure in this young man : they looked on him as one of themselves and dreaded the idea of losing him. When there was any suspicion of a visitation by the police, they stationed look-outs on the surrounding heights to give warning of the approach of the gendarmes. One day the police organised a grand battue—a house-to-house search—and Jean-Marie was concealed in a loft over a stable. Half-choked by the atmosphere of the place, doubly-heated as it was by the hay and the exhalations of the stable below, he expected nothing better than suffocation. The search lasted a long time, and the Curé of Ars declared he had never suffered so much : and he promised Almighty God that, if it were permitted him to get safely out of that loft, he would never complain of anything that might happen to him afterwards. “ And I think I can say that I have very nearly kept my word,” he would add with the most charming simplicity.

The Curé of Ars delighted to dwell on the incidents of his sojourn at Noës. Reminiscence is sometimes a source of great consolation and encouragement to us. Our souvenirs of the past—when they are pleasant—refresh the tired soul which, for a brief moment, is only too content to detach itself from the carking cares of to-day and dwell amid happier scenes of long ago—it is, in a way, a re-living of our life. To his dying day he faithfully preserved in his heart the remembrance of the kindly souls of the village which had given him asylum in his misfortunes. He would have liked to be appointed Curé of Noës ; and there it was, perhaps, that he would have betaken himself, had the Bishop of Belley consented to his retirement. “ If I can get permission to leave the sacred ministry,” he said to Jean-Marie Fayot, who came to Ars in 1841 to see him and make his confession, “ I intend to go and die, either in your midst or at La Grande-Chartreuse.”

M. Vianney's gratitude to the widow Fayot never faded : and in the early years of his ministry he made a practice of writing to her every year. One of these letters has been published and is too true an echo of his affectionate heart to be omitted :—

“ ARS, 7th November, 1823.

“ MADAME MÈRE FAYOT,

“ I cannot adequately explain the pleasure it affords me to write to you every year. I have been considering how I can manage to go and see you and once more personally express my gratitude for all the kindness you showered upon me in the days of my misfortune and banishment. Although far distant in body, I can assure you that you are always present to me in spirit, and more especially during Holy Mass, in which I never fail to ask the good God to console you in your infirmities and troubles.

“ One of my parishioners comes from your neighbourhood :

he suggested that, in the summer, he should go home and I should visit you, when we will spend happy hours talking about the good God and of the happiness awaiting us in that heaven which will be the reward for all your goodness to me.

"You may have thought that, not having written, I had ceased to think of you, and had already forgotten how much you have done for me. No, my dear benefactress, it is all graven on my heart, never to be effaced. I always remember your dear children, who were so kind to me ; and I hope they will do the same for me in their prayers.

"My good Mother, with regard to what you owe me, I gladly remit it. Only, if poor P. is still alive, be so good as to give him an alms, asking a remembrance of me in his prayers. The same of the good D., who very probably is in great distress ; I often think of what she did for me when I came away.

"Tell Mère F. that I have received news of her son who is now a priest ; he is in good health, very devout, and his Bishop is much attached to him.

"Please say to everybody I had the honour to know at Noës, that I send them my respects and grateful acknowledgments for all their kindness, the recollection of which will always remain with me. Also the two excellent young women who live near the presbytery : I have a lively sense of gratitude for their services to me. Ask them to tell the good man who gave me the wherewithal for my journey, that I constantly think of him. Will you say to M.F. and all his family, that I do not forget how much I am indebted to them for all their good deeds on my behalf : and give my compliments to the good T., who was at your house at the same time as myself.

"I hope to pay you a visit next summer. If any one of your children can come to see me in my Bresse (the district in which Ars is situate), it would please me very much ; I shall always be glad to receive any of those who have done so much for me. I may mention that I am in a small parish, in which religion flourishes, and the people serve the good God with all their hearts.

"I conclude, my good Mother, by requesting you to present my humble respects to your excellent Curé, saying that I am deeply sensible of all he did for me during my exile.

"For yourself, my benefactress, I beg you to accept the expression of all that my heart is capable of feeling for you.

J.-B.-M. VIANNEY,
Curé of Ars."

(In the allusion to his parish we may see a proof of the good that had been accomplished at Ars since the coming of M. Vianney.)

If the Abbé Vianney always retained a deep affection for his

adopted mother, she certainly returned it. When she learned of his promotion to the priesthood, she was overjoyed. And when, some weeks later, the news came that he was Vicaire of Écully ; she started off at once to go and see him. She arrived at the presbytery in the middle of a reunion of ecclesiastics, among whom were the Vicars-General of the diocese. Nothing abashed by the presence of such an imposing gathering—she was too intent on her errand to feel the least constraint or embarrassment—she sought out Jean-Marie, her much-loved son ; recognised him in his soutane, went straight up to him, threw her arms round his neck and embraced him affectionately. The Curé of Ars, in his more intimate moments, took a pleasure in recalling the little adventure ; and while laughing at the recollection of the solemn embrace of the good Mère Fayot, would blush delightfully.

The long letter we have given above, contains really nothing about himself. Most of our information has been gleaned from our conversations at Ars. M. le Curé often spoke of his retreat to Noës, and enjoyed telling of his vicissitudes of fortune. Once someone mentioned his cross of the Legion of Honour : he made a wry face as he replied : “ I don’t know why the Emperor should have given it to me ; unless it was for having been a deserter.”

To form a correct estimate of the morality of the action, we must look at it as it appeared to young Vianney’s conscience. Now, it is certain that he acted without a shadow of premeditation : the simple narrative of what happened excludes that idea and even the probability of it. Regard must also be had to the circumstances of the time. It was in the very middle of the war with Spain, after the siege of Saragossa and at the moment of the abduction of Pius VII. France was beginning to tire of shedding her best blood in order to gratify the ambition of a single man ; nor did she covet glory so dearly bought. Discouragement had gradually made itself felt in the army, had eaten its way up to the highest ranks and even infected the marshals themselves. The saying attributed to one of them, in certain famous memoirs, is well known : “ If he will not make an end of it, we will make an end of him.”

While a wondrous renown, marvellous triumphs and unheard-of conquests bore witness to the power of our arms and the genius of the Emperor ; the sufferings and weariness of the country at large were lost sight of in presence of all this military glory. In this hour of dazzling success, the pressure of authority and the exigencies of the law, without being less onerous, had been less keenly felt ; and they were moreover concealed beneath the avalanche of popular self-satisfaction. A great revulsion of feeling came about, not by a culpable inconstancy to ideals, but by the reconsideration of the ideals themselves—how far they coincided with justice and equity or the reverse : while the more capable did not hesitate to censure and predict what the issue must be.

From the midst of the chaos of personal calamities—the numerous and heart-rending losses sustained by individual families—the public calamities reared their heads and added their indictment to the others. The war with Spain, so murderous and so manifestly unjust, came first. Of this it only needs to be said that Napoleon himself often condemned it in conversation at St. Helena: “I own I was wrong to enter upon this affair; its immorality was too patent, its injustice too cynical, it was and remains wicked from beginning to end.” (*Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*: Conversation of 14th June, 1816). Next: the violation of the pontifical territory and the resulting excommunication served to shock the conscience of all right-minded people and avert them from the imperial cause. Sympathy was further estranged by the incessant demands for more men; it even became necessary to force the recruits to march, while the roads were strewn with deserters. And one is driven to ask: whether it was a just law—this cruel impost that weighed so heavily on France and well-nigh bled her to death; whether one was bound in conscience to submit to it; and whether a grievous sin against legal justice was committed by its violation. It is quite clear that—due regard being paid to the circumstances—all these questions may be open to doubt. And this being so, may there not have been some among those who violated the law whose good faith rendered them blameless?

When we examine this grave episode in the life of the Curé of Ars in its personal bearings, we cannot admit that the least suspicion of culpability rests on him. The involuntary omission to fulfil the legal formalities which, had they been complied with as they should have been, would have secured his exemption from military service; his illness; his absence—entirely unintentional—at the time of the departure of the column; the simplicity with which he reported to the Intendant; the appearance of the stranger, who was to him as the angel who guided the younger Tobias on his journey; the connivance of the representative of the law, the good Maire of Noës—all these extraordinary circumstances place personal responsibility for the action of which we have narrated the details out of the question. It seems plain that, from first to last, young Vianney had for his direction and guidance that best of all accomplices: divine Providence.

CHAPTER VI

THE YOUNG VIANNEY RETURNS HOME. HE RESUMES HIS STUDIES WITH THE CURÉ OF ÉCULLY

After a storm thou makest calm, and after tears and weeping thou pourest in joyfulness. (Tob. iii., 22.)

THE peace and tranquillity which the divine goodness had deigned to shed on his period of exile, never caused the young Vianney to lose sight of the vocation which had been revealed to his inner consciousness so early, nor to forget the quiet happiness of his childhood—the joys of the morning of life, which can never be replaced by those of later years, and of which pain and sorrow are powerless to efface the memory. He yearned for brighter days ; in his prayers he asked God to hasten them ; and anxiously awaited the time when a more favourable turn of events should permit him once more to set eyes on his home, the fields he knew so well, the steeple of the church of Écully—everything, in fact, which he now only beheld in spirit—and seat himself again at the feet of his venerated master, to complete his course of study, so long interrupted. In this simple and affectionate soul, the souvenirs of his native village remained ever fresh and vivid. The scenes of his early years passed and re-passed before his imagination with an ever-increasing charm. For him, something pious or consoling attached itself to every stone, every bush, every path through the fields. All his early impressions having thus taken their colour from their environment, he suffered acutely at his enforced separation from people, things and places he had known and loved, but what he missed more than any of them was his family.

Among the various qualities which go to form individual character is one more desirable than any other : it sheds much light on the inner workings of the mind ; and serves, in some sort, as a guarantee of integrity—we refer to the constant practice of a sincere filial piety. Our young man possessed this hall-mark of the just : next to Almighty God, his family was all-in-all to him. Never had he known any other affection, nor thought of other pleasure than that of passing his few moments of leisure in their midst. And now he was separated from them : would he ever see them again ? What was happening to them ?

Alas ! they had received no tidings of the fugitive ; and now, having waited several months in vain, every succeeding day increased their disquiet. His poor mother had fallen ill from anxiety. She had sought the Curé of Écully, in quest of consolation. But, strange to say, saintly man as he was and an example

of patience and gentleness, his thoughts ran in a different channel from hers, and he was almost angry with her. He reproached her with lack of confidence in God, and the interview terminated rather abruptly : nor did his parting words carry full conviction to her mind : " Go away, go away, one of these days your son will be a priest."

As for Matthew Vianney, his troubles were augmented by the unceasing interest that the office of the military Intendant seemed to take in his affairs, and the continual annoyance he experienced at the hands of the law. The recruiting officer paid him a visit at short notice, and called on him to declare what had become of the refractory conscript, under pain of putting in his bailiffs. " I will bring you to the very verge of ruin," said he. Useless for the unhappy father to aver with evident sincerity that he was entirely ignorant of the whereabouts of his son ; they did not even pretend to believe him.

Meanwhile, the widow Fayot found it necessary to go to Charbonnière, to take the mineral waters which are produced in that village, which is only a few kilometres from Écully. " I am going to your part of the country," she told Jean-Marie ; " and I will call on your parents ; telling them that you are with me, but saying nothing of where I come from." So she set out—he lending her a hundred francs—of which, as we have seen in the letter quoted in the previous chapter, the Curé of Ars refused to accept the repayment later on : she went to Dardilly and presented herself to the Vianneys, giving them the news of their son.

Needless to say the family were rejoiced. Jean-Marie alive and well : quite safe and wanting for nothing ! As it had been at Dardilly, so now at the place where he was : everybody loved, respected and blessed him ; they would share with him the little they had, cling to him as long as they could and were ready to defend him at any loss of time or risk of liberty.

During this recital, the poor mother's spirits seemed to revive once more. Her heart overflowed with gratitude to God and this good woman who had been a second mother to her son. It was otherwise with Matthew Vianney, in whose nature sentiment found no place. Though as sincerely affectionate as his wife, he never allowed any expression of it to escape him. He was more prosaic. " Since Jean-Marie is now quite well, he ought to join his corps," he remarked. " That is just what he shall not do ! " retorted the widow, with spirit, " I tell you that at once. He is worth more than all your property put together ; and if you contrive to discover where he is, I will find another refuge for him and every man and woman in the commune will do the same."

But if Claudine Fayot deemed reticence to be her duty with regard to the father, she made up for it by the confidence she displayed towards the mother. It was not in human nature to keep back a single item of the thousand-and-one details for which the

maternal heart hungered. She told her everything and, at the same time, suggested a means by which correspondence might be carried on. The widow Bibost, of Écully, a most reliable person and a devoted friend of the family, was to be asked to act as intermediary between mother and son.

Several months passed, and the conscription of 1810 arrived. Francis Vianney the younger—it may be remembered that there were two brothers in the family bearing this name—drew a high number. Not that this was likely to affect matters much in the end, for, in those times, everybody was taken. He was advised to volunteer for the Reserve, so that his spontaneous enlistment might rid the house of the plague of bailiffs and the attentions of the police.

And in this connexion a curious coincidence took place and one to which the Curé often drew our attention as marvellous. The same Captain Blanchard who had given Jean-Marie such a rough reception at Roanne, now willingly exerted himself in his interest—and to such good purpose that the substitution of one brother for the other was approved by the military authorities and the name of Jean-Marie Vianney was erased from the rolls of his corps.

When the news of the altered fortunes of Jean-Marie reached Noës, it was received with very mixed feelings. There was a general desire to subscribe towards the expenses of his return home; and offers of money, clothes and linen were speedily forthcoming—all were determined that his appearance should be worthy of the occasion. A tailor was requisitioned from Roanne to make a soutane, in which they said they must see him garbed before his departure. His benefactress gave him the towels which had formed part of her wedding trousseau and had not yet been separated from the original piece. Another kind woman forced upon him all the money she had; and when he vainly endeavoured to refuse it, said: "Make no difficulty about the matter, I am still rich, for I have a fortune in my pig-sty." The poor woman had a pig to sell, and that was what she called her fortune!

The departure of "M. Jérôme" was attended with great and unanimous regret, only softened by the thoughts of the pleasure it would give the fugitive to regain his family, resume his studies and follow his vocation; and also by the hope that he would one day return to Noës as their Curé, which he formally promised them to do, should it be possible.

Thus Jean-Marie was restored to his family, after an absence of fourteen months. The return home of the younger Tobias may give us some idea of all that was said, of the tears of joy that flowed, and of the feelings of these good and simple souls. To his poor mother it seemed as though she was assisting at a resurrection of the son she had never thought to see again.

Of course the Curé of Écully shared in the general rejoicing—

the more so that he had never lost faith in Providence. The return of his pupil realised the desire of his heart, and seemed to crown the work of his life. He could now look forward to his own end with tranquillity, sure that a devoted hand would close his eyes ; and he echoed the words of the aged Simeon : " Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word in peace." (Luke ii., 29.) Had he been able to pierce the veil of the future, he would possibly have been moved to continue the canticle—adapting the words to the child whose spiritual life he had done so much to form : " For my eyes have seen once more, him Thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples, to be their salvation, the light which shall enlighten the nations, and the glory of Israel."

And now, without further hindrance from the law, and free from all disquiet, Jean-Marie found once again a guidance at once firm and gentle at the hands of his old master ; thanks to which all his good dispositions developed and increased. Sustained and encouraged by the counsels and, more than all, by the example of one grown old in the practice of everything that is good, he strove to confirm himself in the spirit of humility, abnegation and self-sacrifice, without which it is impossible to serve God and one's neighbour as they should be served. He endeavoured to free his heart from the things of this earth, by raising it to God on the wings of simplicity and purity.

Although he already practised some form of penance, he was well aware that the best of all penances is always to conform to the divine will rather than our own, and this in spite of our repugnance, disgust or weariness. Recognising with what respect the gifts of God should be treated, he made it his constant effort to become an efficient workman in the service of his Master. He would be a saint and save souls. To the accomplishment of this object, ever present in his thoughts, he brought that patient zeal which compensates for lack of talents, and takes the place of genius—if indeed, it be not itself genius. He conceived the priesthood as it should be conceived ; and desired to become, as far as erring man can become, sufficient for the many and grave requirements of the sacred office.

It was about this time that he lost his saintly mother. Her death was to him a most intense sorrow ; but he found his consolation in his love and reverence for the holy will of God.

CHAPTER VII

THE YOUNG VIANNEY ENTERS THE LESSER SEMINARY AT VERRIÈRES. HIS COURSE OF PHILOSOPHY

She (Wisdom) conducted the just through the right ways . . . and gave him the knowledge of the holy things, made him honourable in his labours. (Wisd. x., 10.)

I leave syllogisms, finesse, sophistry and subtle speculations to you. I leave you to cry "Socrates" or "Plato" at leisure; to talk yourself hoarse and argue on one side or the other. I leave to you that marvellous art of which Aristotle has the secret. An intellect, simple and pure, transcends them all; and without the aid of philosophy rises into the very presence of God. (*Poés. spirit.*, Bk. I, Sat. i., B. Jacopone da Todi.)

YOUNG Vianney's classical studies were coming to an end. By the aid of human science he had developed his natural faculties; and his deficiencies in intellectual culture were amply counterbalanced by his eminent qualities of heart and soul. It was time the gates of the sanctuary opened before him.

The Abbé Balley could have conducted him, step by step, right up to the priesthood; but he wisely considered that there were great advantages to be derived from the ordeal of common life and also that, by placing him in one of the diocesan establishments, superiors, having seen for themselves, would be better able to judge of his capacity. So Jean-Marie was sent to the Lesser Seminary of Verrières to follow the course of philosophy.

Then, as now, Verrières was a house where piety was held in honour; but, by reason of the spirit of literary emulation which reigned there, as in all public educational establishments, each new student was estimated by his fellows according to the supposed extent of his acquirements and the fame of his previous successes. Virtue—especially when it is sincere—does not appear at first sight: as is its wont, it cometh not with observation. Human science is different: it loves to display itself and, being superficial, attracts more readily.

The contemporaries of the young Vianney, therefore, may be held excused, in that they failed to recognise all at once that they had in their midst a pearl of great price. One fact was very evident: the new arrival was not in any way remarkable for scholarship. That was quite plain; but the moral superiority which atoned for the inadequacy of his earlier studies—commenced altogether too late, mutilated, interrupted, resumed, as we have seen—was by no means so plain. The events of this wonderful career fully justify our contention that divine Providence had willed to have it so, in order that everything connected with this admirable man might be the direct work of His own hands. This same God—whom spiritual books call 'The God of Science'*—

* For the Lord is a God of all knowledge (I Kings ii., 3).

sometimes disdains the co-operation of human science and effects His purpose without it, to abase the pride which would assert itself against Him. Modern society, so contemptuous of divine assistance, so sceptical concerning supernatural intervention, so confident in itself and of the eventual outcome of its efforts, so proud of its material progress, has much need of such lessons.

Be this as it may, the ignorance of our saintly young man was the source of extraordinary graces received by him, both for his own benefit and that of others. It drew upon him, at the time of his entry at Verrières, many an affront, which he bore with magnanimity ; and it furnished him all through life with a touching pretext for humility.

If one would know how far this humility had carried him, up to this, one can do no better than read the following letter, which came into our hands quite accidentally :—

“ 13th June, 1813.

“ Very dear Father,

“ Permit me, the most unworthy of your children, to enjoy the privilege of once more writing to a father whose kindness he does not deserve, after taking such unworthy advantage of it for so long. But the tenderness of a father has no bounds ; his affection ever reasserts itself, even towards an ungrateful son, whose conduct only calls for reprehension but who, nevertheless, has always been loaded with kindness.

“ Yes, most honoured Father, I am forced to admit that only a parent who has received special graces from the hand of God can be expected to forget the behaviour of such an ungrateful son as myself.

“ Alas ! what remains for me, except to betake myself to the presence of Him who alone can make up for my deficiencies, there to weep over my ingratitude to a father so worthy of all my regard ? How many marks of affection did I not receive from you, the last time I had the good fortune to meet you ?

“ I can assure you, dearest Father, that as long as it pleases the good God to spare me, I shall never allow a single day to pass without earnest prayer on your behalf ; that it may please heaven to bless and preserve you for as long as may seem good to the divine wisdom so to do. No, never, dearest Father, your innumerable kindnesses will never be effaced from my memory ; nor my own want of due appreciation of them, which will be for me a source of life-long regret.

“ Deign then, my dear Father, to forget the past. May God forgive me, as you yourself will forgive me ; so that one day we may meet in the presence of Him who is the reward exceeding great of the Blessed in heaven. There, your sorrows and my compunction will have an end, never to recommence.

"I am writing, dearest Father, not so much to give you news of myself, as to ask for news of you ; for the remembrance of me must inevitably remind you of my faults.

"I send my respects to my dear brother, who has shared your anxieties ; and ask him to reply on your behalf.

"As to my studies, they are progressing rather better than I had expected. I am looking forward to the time when I shall be able to see you again.

"Pray then, very dear Father, to accept the most humble respects of a son who is unworthy of you, but whose knowledge of your affection re-animates his confidence.

Your very humble servant,

J.-M. VIANNEY."

What touching humility ! What respect for paternal authority ! There is a sublime simplicity about the language of those privileged souls whom God calls to the highest degree of sanctity. We have not ventured to present the foregoing letter in any other terms than those of the writer ; for they show clearly how careful was this young man to preserve in his heart the spirit of discipline and obedience.

To return to the Seminary of Verrières : we may mention that the Superior was the Abbé Barou, who died Vicar-General of Lyons ; the Spiritual Father, the Abbé Merle ; while the Prefect of Studies was M. Rossat, afterwards Bishop of Verdun. Philosophy was divided into two sections ; the Professor of the first was M. Grange, then Vicar-General to the Cardinal Archbishop of Lyons ; the second—to which the young Vianney belonged—was presided over by M. Chazelles, who eventually entered the Society of Jesus and died in Canada.

A revulsion of feeling was not long in showing itself in regard to Jean-Marie ; and in the light of experience, popular prejudice began to give way to respect and sympathy ; particularly when they found that this very ignorant individual really possessed a wonderful wisdom in spiritual matters. The reaction originated with the professors—excellent judges of the merits and demerits of their students. The distinguished priests who conducted the Seminary could not but admire so much modesty, discretion and regularity, such prompt obedience, solid piety and formed virtue. They discussed the matter between themselves ; exchanged the results of each day's observation of the new arrival ; and came to the conclusion that he was a perfect pattern of a good seminarian. From the professors this appreciation spread to the students ; and increased gradually, as, day by day, some fresh instance came to light, of the charity, gentleness, patience and humility which possessed his soul—the fruits of a love of God and his neighbour, ripe before their time.

His piety had the uncommon quality of being acceptable to all,

without any compromise prejudicial to its free and natural expansion : it irresistibly commanded esteem and respect : nor was it an isolated sentiment, without bearing on his general conduct ; it was the foundation of all his good qualities, the divine root whence those generous characteristics which impart to youth its principal charm drew their sap. The grace within appeared so unmistakably in his outward demeanour, that his fellow-students vied with one another for the pleasure of his conversation and company.

But this approbation of his virtue, and the encomiums passed upon it, were the cause of a fresh trial. A college is a world in miniature. There the youth learns to struggle against the passions which he will meet with later in life, in that larger arena where all men contend on equal terms for place and pre-eminence. His ingenuous mind there makes acquaintance with the little rivalries which war, and the petty ambitions which collide, with those of others. Our young philosopher was in no wise exempt from this experience.

Among his associates was one who could not endure the eulogies that the exemplary conduct of Jean-Marie evoked ; for they seemed much too like a reproach to himself. If it be the privilege of piety to draw unto itself the sympathy of kindred souls, it undoubtedly very often embitters those characters who will have none of it. To the affronts and attacks of this ill-conditioned comrade, the angelic youth only opposed that patience and tranquillity which are the special prerogative of saints.

One day, when affronts had been followed by threats, and these had been succeeded by blows, with constantly increasing violence, we are told that our young man fell on his knees before his persecutor and asked pardon for anything he might have done to displease him.

There is a great similarity between all really great souls. St. Francis Jérôme, when a prefect at the College of Nobles, conducted by the Society of Jesus, received a blow from the hands of a scholar, beside himself with anger. Instead of punishing the insolent boy, he knelt and—following the precept of the Gospel—offered the other cheek. For St. Francis Jérôme, as for the young Vianney, the same generosity had the same reward. Confounded at an outcome so unexpected, ashamed of his own unworthy conduct, it now became the turn of the real culprit to ask forgiveness of his victim. Thus, by not suffering himself to be “overcome by evil,” Jean-Marie “overcame evil by good,” (Rom. xii., 21) and moreover he “gained his brother.” (Matt. xviii., 15.) He who had resisted all else, yielded to gentleness ; his eyes were opened, his heart softened and his anger ceased. Useless to rebel ; yield he must ; it is God’s decree : “Blessed are the meek : for they shall possess the land.” (Matt. v., 4.)

When one finds in youth such traits as this, one is less astonished to find in riper years the heroism of the saint. It were easy to foresee what flowers the maturity of a life would bear, when that life produced such blossoms in its earlier stages.

It was after this fashion that Jean-Marie Vianney prepared himself, by study, prayer, the practice of virtue, the fostering of high ideals, the perfect performance of every duty, for the mission, as yet hidden in the obscurity of the future, whereunto it had pleased God to call him.

CHAPTER VIII

THE YOUNG VIANNEY COMMENCES HIS COURSE OF THEOLOGY. FRESH TRIALS. HIS ENTRY AT THE GREATER SEMINARY OF ST. IRENÆUS. PROMOTION TO HOLY ORDERS

Who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord : or who shall stand in his holy place ? The innocent in hands, and clean of heart, who hath not taken his soul in vain, . . . He shall receive a blessing from the Lord. . . (Ps. xxiii., 3-4-5.)

I have exalted one chosen out of my people . . . with my holy oil I have anointed him . . . and my truth and my mercy shall be with him. (Ps. lxxviii., 20-1-5.)

IN the month of July in this same year, 1813, Jean-Marie Vianney returned to Écully, to commence his course of theology under the direction of M. Balley.

From the very commencement of this new subject, he felt more at ease and his horizon seemed to change completely.

Theology, without being exclusively science, reason, or faith, is a compound of all three : they are there blended into one harmonious whole. It is the fullest knowledge of God and His truth to which man in his present state can attain ; leaving nothing but the rending of the veil which the limitations of human nature interpose to afford the clear vision of Him, who is now seen as through a glass darkly. It incorporates all that science has discovered concerning the laws which govern the physical and intellectual world, not to expound or elaborate them for their own sake, but in order to deduce from them the further knowledge of God and His creatures. It seizes upon all those elementary ideas originating in human reason and makes them the foundation and preamble of truths still higher. Finally, it receives from faith illumination and certitude concerning divine things ; in the light of which it reconsiders those things that are merely human. Thus, it confers on science both elevation and depth ; it enlarges the scope of human reason ; and it strengthens and clarifies faith itself.

The young Vianney no longer encountered in his new branch of study any of that difficulty and distaste which at one time bade fair to discourage him from the pursuit of an intellectual career entirely. It is true that his professor thought it best to simplify the process as much as might be, by substituting more homely instructions for the standard and time-honoured works then generally followed. A shrewd presentiment told him that the Holy Spirit would put the coping-stone on the theological edifice of which he was now laying the foundations ; and that this same

divine Spirit would do for the intellect of his pious pupil, all that He had already done for his heart ; and that, when the right moment should have arrived, He would "teach him all truth." (John xvi., 13.)

After a year or two of assiduous tuition on the part of the master, and of equally persevering efforts by the pupil, the latter was deemed to be sufficiently prepared ; and the Curé of Écully thought he might venture to produce his theologian in public, and present him for examination at the Greater Seminary of Lyons.

Alas ! this presentation was to end in a supreme trial, and one by which it pleased God to achieve in the soul of this young man the interior work of entire self-renunciation, which was to make him, later in life, such an admirable instrument in His almighty hands. When God makes choice of a soul : when he destines that soul for some great work : He places His seal upon it, and that seal is the Cross.

In the presence of an imposing array of examiners, confusion overcame the timid theologian ; his self-possession deserted him, and he could only blush and stammer through answers without meaning or sequence. He was accordingly dismissed, with scant encouragement. M. Balley, on whom recoiled a portion of this discomfiture, promptly interviewed the Superior of the Greater Seminary ; and prevailed on him to go, next day, to the presbytery at Écully, accompanied by one of the Vicars-General, M. l'abbé Bochard. He hoped, by thus giving him another trial, to enable his pupil to recover lost ground : and this was exactly what happened. These gentlemen declared themselves satisfied, and promised to make a favourable report to the diocesan authorities. Thereupon, Jean-Marie was admitted to the Greater Seminary of St. Irenæus, there to prepare for ordination.

To relate the history of the time Jean-Marie passed at St. Irenæus is but to repeat what has already been said. In the world he had lived the life of a seminarian ; here he lived like a denizen of another world. His one preoccupation was to make his daily life approach more nearly to his ideals of a vocation ; and to concentrate his energies, of which contact with the world had been powerless to tarnish the purity or soften the temper, on the service of God and the perfection of his own soul. His humility, gentleness and piety seemed to increase. While they could scarcely be concealed from the observation of those around him ; the acts of interior renunciation and mortification, by which he strove to build up the new man on the ruins of the old one, were known only to God. From this time he appears to have acquired such a perfect self-mastery as to be impervious to lesser things ; and could devote himself to the performance of the most perfect thing in the most perfect manner. He was never known to infringe a rule in the most minute particular ; none ever surprised him in conversation during silence-time ; nobody ever found him

distant or uncivil at recreation. Nor did he manifest choice or preference in his companionships ; he accepted the first that came and tried to make himself all things to all men, that he might gain all to Jesus Christ. In this connexion, we cannot apply to his actions the construction that is very often applied to such by young men of the period, to whom everything is only just as it appears on the surface. In his case, a universal benevolence did not signify a regard so generally distributed as to amount to nothing in particular ; but consisted in real sympathy for each and every one with whom he was associated, without exclusion or selection : and all who approached him invariably found him interested in themselves and their concerns. He never sought mere amusement from his intercourse with others ; and even respect induced, or friendship attracted, flattering as they might seem, were only valued by him in so far as they influenced the individual concerned for good.

Although his disposition and tastes leaned naturally to those matters in which piety was concerned, he never tried to lead up to them, so as to be able to converse more easily, exhibit his knowledge of spiritual things, or appear virtuous. He lent himself readily to every sort of conversation, adapting himself to every variation of mood or variety of character, without either constraint or ostentation ; but always keeping himself as much as possible out of sight. Such were the impressions made by Jean-Marie Vianney on his fellow-students, from whom the above account is mostly derived.

The inferiority of M. Vianney's abilities has perhaps been exaggerated. It is certain that in him grace supplied for nature, by imparting intellectual virtues and infused qualities, which no one who has seen him engaged in the difficult work of his apostolate can ignore ; but it seems to us that it has been too often repeated that the Curé of Ars was a man of hardly any parts at all. What has fostered this prejudice more than all is, without doubt, his own way of talking of himself at every opportunity. One day, when we ourselves wanted to verify the exact number of years he spent at Écully under the tutelage of M. Balley, he protested against the word " studies," which we had used : " I never made any studies," said he, " M. Balley did try for five or six years to teach me something ; his efforts were thrown away, for he could never get anything into my poor head."

Fortunately we are able to oppose to this testimony—which the excessive modesty of its author must render suspect—that of one of his own contemporaries at the Greater Seminary : " Every time that M. Vianney was questioned on points of dogmatic or moral theology, it was in French, by reason of his inability to express himself in Latin ; and his replies, although short, were always correct and to the point."

Here is another opinion, more explicit still, and from an autho-

rity no less reliable—M. l'abbé Tournier, Curé of Grand-Corent : “ I do not recollect that M. Vianney made any great impression one way or the other—by extraordinary capacity or incapacity. In the scholastic year 1812-13, he was in philosophy at Verrières, as I was myself : there were two hundred of us. M. Vianney not being in my section, I cannot speak positively. I believe, however, that he was weak in the subject ; but numbers of others were no stronger. To assert that M. Vianney was nothing but an ignoramus is a gross mis-statement. I am persuaded that M. Vianney was one of those men who, though they may not shine outwardly, nevertheless possess a sound and stable judgment ; which is of more value than that superficial genius, which fascinates by the aid of a prodigious memory and great facility of speech, but has nothing more solid. This last produces flowers in plenty ; the former brings forth more fruit, without so many flowers.”

For the rest, the exceeding diffidence of M. Vianney was the occasion of many interior acts of humility. How many times, during the long hours he spent in the chapel before the Blessed Sacrament, must his sole consolation have been to unite himself with the humiliations of his Master, and to repeat, in the penitential spirit of David : “ I thank Thee, my God, that thou hast made us a reproach to our neighbours, a scoff and derision to them that are round about us. . . All these things have come upon us, yet we have not forgotten thee : and we have not done wickedly in thy covenant . . . and our heart hath not turned back : neither hast thou turned aside our steps from thy way.” (Ps. xliii., 14-8-9.)

We are told that “ the prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds : and till it come nigh he will not be comforted : and he will not depart till the most High behold.” (Ecclus. xxxv., 21.) It may be urged that, in the present instance, this prayer was not answered. No, it was not—immediately. But, in the light of after events—which most of those who set him down as incapable were destined to witness—can it be alleged it was never answered at all ?

Meanwhile the time for ordination was drawing near. Before coming to a final decision, it behoved the directors of the Greater Seminary to consider the qualifications of the candidates with the utmost care. When the name of Jean-Marie Vianney was brought forward, they were so doubtful they hardly knew what to say. True, his piety, regularity and exemplary moral character were in his favour : but then, he had so little learning. Were they to ignore the adverse verdict of the examiners, and call him to Holy Orders ? Should they postpone the matter, and allow him to wait awhile ? Perhaps, after all, it would be more prudent to send him back to his family and his agricultural labours. But, before committing themselves to such an extreme course, it would be

well to consult the diocesan authorities ; and this they resolved to do.

In the absence of the Cardinal Archbishop, whom the exigencies of ecclesiastical politics detained elsewhere, the diocese was administered by one who is remembered by all who knew him as an exemplar of penetration and good sense, hidden by an air of simplicity and frankness which might have been taken for mere geniality. The Abbé Courbon possessed, in a very remarkable degree, the faculty of appraising his subjects and employing them to the best advantage. It was said that he read his man at a glance, described him in a word, and relegated him to his proper place by a stroke of the pen. To him, therefore, the directors of the Greater Seminary carried their perplexities. He reflected a moment : then he asked : " Is this young Vianney pious ? Does he say his rosary well ? Has he a devotion to the Blessed Virgin ? " " He is a model of piety," was the unanimous reply. " Well then," rejoined the Vicar-General, " I accept him ; divine grace will do the rest."

Rarely did an emergency find the Abbé Courbon unprepared ; and so it had been on the present occasion. At the first hint of fresh difficulties, the Curé of Écully had hastened to save the situation. Taking advantage of the great influence which his virtues and experience had given him at the cathedral, he had pleaded the cause of his well-beloved son with the Vicar-General, dissipating all fears and resolving all doubts. " There is one thing," the Curé of Ars often said, in referring to the incident, " for which M. Balley will find it difficult to justify himself before the good God : it is for having stood security for me and taking under his wing such a poor ignorant creature as myself." This is the only thing in the nature of a reproach to the memory of his venerated master that ever fell from the lips of the disciple. We may piously believe the account exacted from M. Balley, under this heading, to have been altogether insignificant.

The continued absence of Cardinal Fesch in Paris imposed on the Vicars-General the constant necessity of recurring to the bishops of neighbouring dioceses for the ordination of their subjects. When these happened in the Ember-days about Christmas or Easter, the candidates usually repaired to Grenoble, but, at the close of the scholastic year, the ceremony took place in the metropolitan cathedral and the ordaining prelate came thither.

This last happened in the case of the Abbé Vianney. He received the sub-diaconate 2nd July, 1814. M. Millon—afterwards Director of the Lesser Seminary at Meximieux, and Curé of Bény—was fortunate enough to be next him during the ordination ; of which he religiously preserved, and delighted to recall, the recollections. Throughout the entire ceremony, the devotion of his neighbour reacted most powerfully upon him ; his presence seemed a perpetual reminder ; while his countenance was aglow

with a happiness not of this world. While returning from the cathedral to the Greater Seminary, all chanted the *Benedictus*: and, when they came to the verse *Et tu, puer, propheta Altissimi vocaberis: præibis enim ante faciem Domini parare vias ejus*, the Abbé Vianney uttered the words with an expression so remarkable that, after the lapse of many years, M. Millon declared he still seemed to hear them. Nor did he refrain from making the obvious application.

M. Vianney was raised to the diaconate in the following year; and six months later his superiors adjudged him ripe for the priesthood. He was ordained priest in the cathedral at Grenoble, by Mgr. Simon—the same prelate who had initiated him into the lower grades. He was the only candidate.

The modesty of the Curé of Ars withheld him from saying ought concerning his feelings on the occasion. That it made the most profound impression on him must be evident to all who have followed the record of his marvellous piety and devotion thus far. It is still more evident from the words in which he was wont to describe the dignity of a priest and the sublimity of his functions in his catechetical instructions at Ars. More than all, is it evident from his daily life for so many years, which will be described in these pages—a life of the most complete self-sacrifice and absolute devotion to the service of God and the salvation of souls, from the day he became Vicaire of Écully till the day on which he yielded up his saintly soul into the hands of Him who gave it.

CHAPTER IX

THE ABBÉ VIANNEY AS VICAIRE OF ÉCULLY. HIS CHARITY AND MORTIFICATION. DEATH OF M. BALLEY. M. VIANNEY IS APPOINTED CURÉ OF ARS

And I will raise me up a faithful priest, who shall do according to my heart, and my soul, and I will build him a faithful house, and he shall walk all days before my anointed. (I. Kings, ii., 35.)

(NOTE : Much of what follows has been derived from the records of the Abbé Renard, whose veneration and affection for the priest who shed such lustre on his native parish suggested to him, at one time, the idea of writing the history of his life. For twenty years he collected with pious care all the information which might one day enable him to do honour to the memory of of one so dear to him. This material has proved a mine of wealth to the present writer ; for which he is only too happy to express his obligations to the respected companion of his labours and solitude.)

THE Abbé Vianney was ordained priest 9th August, 1815, at the age of twenty-nine. We learn from the Memoirs of Catherine Lassagne and the MSS. of the Abbé Renard that, on his return from Grenoble, he found the roads of Dauphiné occupied by soldiers. It was a veritable invasion—an Austrian army-corps, having its right at Bourgoin, and covering the roads as far as Voreppe. Forced to pass this foreign legion, he was often in fear of his life : one man threatened him with his musket, another with his sword ; most of them insulted him ; he almost despaired of reaching Lyons safe and sound.

The moment M. Vianney became a priest, the Curé of Écully repaired to the cathedral and asked for his services as vicairé ; to which M. Courbon made no difficulty. This was naturally a source of the greatest gratification to M. Balley, who saw in it the answer to his prayers, the reward of all his labours and patience, and it consoled him for the many and great difficulties that had beset the preparation of the young Vianney for the priesthood. And now it was to be permitted to him to complete the work to which he had put his hand ; by supplementing the inexperience of the newly ordained priest by practical lessons in that most difficult of all arts, the direction of souls and management of a parish.

The satisfaction of the Abbé Vianney was no less keen. This was all he could have wished for : a kindred spirit, a father, guide and friend, under whose hand the grace of his ordination would augment and develop ; and divine Providence to co-operate with the efforts of both. Besides : what a happiness it would be to be able to render his benefactor, in his old age, all those services which might in some measure repay the much greater benefits he had received from his youth up.

The day of his arrival at Écully was a festival, not only at the presbytery but also throughout the parish. Rich and poor alike rejoiced to welcome the return of the young man whom they had known, so pious and so modest, when only a student. "We loved him right well when he was with us before," they said; "he edified us then. What will it be now that he is a priest?"

These good folks made no mistake. The fervour of their new Vicaire knew no bounds, his devotion to his apostolic labours no rest. All he had hitherto done for his Master seemed to him as nothing. All his prayers, penances, trials and humiliations, had but whetted his anxiety to do and suffer yet more for Jesus Christ. At the same time there was nothing forced or exaggerated in his zeal; the spirit of prudence and counsel comes early to souls matured by religion. Piety had given the Vicaire of Écully a soundness of judgment and sense of proportion which those of ordinary virtue hardly acquire after long years of experience. He very soon won from all classes a confidence and respect which every priest must have if he is to be successful. His first penitent was his venerated master himself.

On the eves of festivals he passed the whole day and part of the night in the sacred tribunal; hardly finding time to say his Mass, recite his breviary and snatch his single and scanty meal. Here he gently and sweetly encouraged tired souls to perseverance; here the voice of pride was stilled in presence of his contagious humility; here the rich found themselves powerless to stay their hands and willingly poured out of their abundance that it might be dispensed by his beneficent hands; while sceptics and doubters passed from admiration to complete belief and practice of the holy religion which could produce such visible results in the soul of their saintly Vicaire.

Although he was affable, gracious and obliging towards all, he evinced—now, as ever—particular compassion and tenderness for the poor and the children. His goods, such as they were, were common property. His heart and purse opened spontaneously in response to every appeal. The memory of his insatiable charity was long fresh and green in Écully and its neighbourhood. Here is one instance among many of the same sort:—He had long worn the same soutane, which grew more and more dilapidated until its condition could no longer be concealed. He was often told that, in deference to his own self-respect, for the honour of his cloth, he ought to be better dressed. His invariable reply was: "I will see about it;" and meanwhile his slender salary continued, as before, to melt away in alms and good works. At length, having been more than usually importuned about the matter, he determined to place in the hands of the churchwarden's wife the sum necessary for a new soutane. But a few hours later brought him a visit from a lady of position whom ill-fortune and her own large heart, which always gave without counting the

cost, had reduced to extreme want. The good Vicaire did not think twice. At the close of an interview full of distressing confidences, his only thought was how to help this noble and impoverished lady. He ran to the house of the churchwarden and asked Madame for the return of his deposit. The worthy woman, not doubting that the money had been intended for the making of a new soutane—her husband was a tailor—opposed a thousand excellent reasons, each more luminous and persuasive than the last. "All very well, all very well," replied the obstinate Vicaire; "but give me back my money and we will see about it afterwards." No great effort of imagination is necessary to surmise the road the money took, for, the same evening Madame de X. received an anonymous remittance of precisely the same amount.

He was ever ready to sacrifice his own comfort and convenience for the good of others. The sick found him anxious to hasten to their bedside at the least sign—assiduous in attention, patient to listen and ingenious in consolation. But the virtue in which he most excelled was penance; this he could practise at his ease, under the auspices of a Curé who still conserved the habits of the cloister and imported into the presbytery the Rule of the Institute of which he had been one of the most fervent members. For example; it was agreed between M. Balley and his Vicaire that they should recite the Hours of the Canonical Office in common and at fixed and invariable hours; that they should never sleep away from home; that they should make a day's recollection every month and the spiritual exercises every year.

"I should have finished by acquiring some little virtue," the Curé of Ars would say, "if I had always had the blessing of living with M. Balley. To make one wish to love the good God, one had only to hear him say: 'My God, I love Thee with my whole heart.' He repeated this invocation every minute of the day when alone; and at night he never ceased to do so until he fell asleep."

The virtues, the talents, the sanctity of his old master were a favourite topic of conversation with the Curé of Ars. When he wished to edify his congregation by stories culled from contemporary history, the name of M. Balley rose at once to his lips and his eyes would fill with tears as he retailed some touching anecdote concerning him.

He used to say that "Nobody had ever made him understand better than M. Balley to what an extent the soul can disengage itself from the senses and man approach the angel." He became positively terrifying when, in his catechisms, he told of the disciplines, hair-shirts, iron chains, bracelets and other instruments of penance with which the holy man crucified his flesh and afflicted himself. Not seldom the feeble faith of some of his listeners, appalled by a heroism so far beyond their capacity to understand or appreciate, would impel them to remonstrate with their Curé for dwelling on such horrifying details.

One thing the Curé of Ars was most careful to conceal ; the fact—proved beyond a doubt—that the disciple was no whit behind the master in this matter of penance. There was in effect a perpetual struggle between the two as to which should outdo the other. They very soon agreed to forbid themselves even the suspicion of sensuous satisfaction and make most rigorous mortification their universal rule. An ordinary person can form no conception of the life they lived. Said the Curé of Ars to Catherine one day : “ When we had commenced on a joint of beef, for instance, or some potatoes, they lasted several weeks. Sometimes this poor beef became quite black before it was finished.” We can say of the Curé of Écully and his Vicaire what was said of St. Benedict and his disciple St. Romanus, to wit : they shared not so much the same feast as the same fast.

M. Balley was a man of great stature, noble and majestic bearing, very imposing exterior—a Roman profile, as M. Vianney expressed it—and an athletic build. Such a man required more abundant nourishment than most ; yet the contrary was his habit and very often he seemed unable to support his gigantic frame owing to the rigour of his fasts.

Eventually the parishioners became alarmed and, it is said, sent a deputation to the diocesan authorities to induce them to enjoin the two priests to take more care of themselves.

But already had M. Balley completed the tale of his years and merits. His strength was prematurely exhausted by work, watching and penance, together with the hardships he had undergone during the Reign of Terror. Besides, he had lived to see the restoration of Catholic worship and the rehabilitation of Holy Church. By his efforts Écully had become an oasis in the midst of the spiritual desert around, where the old leaven of the Revolution still lingered. There was nothing to bind him to this world and he could repeat to his spiritual child, Vianney, the words of the mother of St. Augustine to her son : “ O my son ! for me the present life holds nothing. What am I to do here ? Why do I remain here ? All my hopes in this world have been fulfilled. There was but one thing for which I desired to live—to see you a priest before I died. God has granted me this, and in all its fullness, since I have seen you condemn all earthly happiness the better to serve Him. What remains for me here below ? ” (Confess. Bk. ix., ch. 10.)

The old servant of Jesus Christ then awaited with confidence and serenity the coming of the hour at which his Master should call for an account of his stewardship. In his eyes death was but the repose of the labourer at the end of the day—his home-coming after a long and toilsome journey. Very soon the state of weakness to which age and privation had reduced him was complicated by an ulcer in the leg, which confined him to bed from February to June, 1817—at the very least, for his signature is not to

be found under entries in the parish register during that period. On 5th June he took a funeral ; this was his last appearance in public. Early frosts aggravated his condition ; the disease gained ground and signs of gangrene appeared.

At the news of this forecast of his approaching end the neighbouring priests, to whom M. Balley was like a father and who venerated him as a saint, flocked to his bedside. They would learn to die, they said, from one who had showed them so well how to live. The patient took advantage of their presence to ask his Vicaire for the Last Sacraments. The scene was an impressive one, and those present could not restrain their tears at this spectacle of a young saint ministering to an old one. Before receiving Holy Viaticum, the sick man sat up in bed and addressing the little assemblage, asked pardon for the scandal he had given them. The Vicaire, in turn, speaking for himself and the others, begged forgiveness for any pain or anxiety of which they might have been the involuntary cause.

Next day, the Abbé Vianney celebrated Mass for M. Balley, the entire village being present. He then returned to the bedside of his friend, who had desired to speak to him alone. During the interview the dying man entrusted to the other all his instruments of penance. "Take these, my poor Vianney," said he, "and hide them away somewhere. If anyone finds them when I am gone they will think I have done something to expiate the sins of my lifetime and leave me in purgatory till the end of the world." Presently he blessed the young priest who was weeping at the foot of the bed. "Adieu, dear child ; courage ! Continue to love and serve the good Master. Remember me at the holy altar. Adieu, we shall meet above."

A few minutes after his eyes closed on the scenes of this world, to open on the eternal felicity of the next. "He died," said M. Vianney, "like the saint that he was. His beautiful soul ascended to the angelic host to add a new joy to paradise." When he died, he was sixty-six years and three months old ; and had governed the parish of Écully for fifteen years. His former pupil, the Abbé Loras, Superior of the Lesser Seminary at Meximieux, presided at the funeral which took place the day after his death, 17th December, 1817.

Such was the renown for sanctity that M. Balley left behind him that, when excavations began in the old cemetery at Écully some five-and-twenty years after, in order to lay the foundations of the new church, everyone expected to find his body incorrupt. It was therefore thought more prudent to exhume the venerated remains at night, to avoid any manifestations by the crowd which might have been present.

Conscious of the loss they had sustained and of the difficulty of replacing a man of such great worth ; all eyes in Écully turned with one accord to the Vicaire whom M. Balley had trained in his

own school. But, ask as they would, it was impossible to overcome his modesty ; he thought himself incapable of filling such an important post.

Two months later the Abbé Vianney was appointed Curé of Ars. In giving him his official papers, M. Courbon said to him : " Go, my friend ; there is not much love of God in that parish ; you will enkindle it."



Villard-Vernu, Phot., Ars (Ain).

The Church at Ars at the time of M. Vianney.

CHAPTER X

THE VILLAGE OF ARS. THE PREDECESSORS OF M. VIANNEY. HIS ARRIVAL. HIS CONTINUAL PRAYER. FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF HIS PARISHIONERS

And the ancients of the city wondered, and meeting him, they said : Is thy coming hither peaceable ? and he said : It is peaceable : I am come to offer sacrifice to the Lord. (I. Kings, xvi., 4-5.)

Messenger he seem'd, and friend fast-knit to Christ ; and the first love he showed was after the first counsel that Christ gave. Many a time his nurse, at entering, found that he had risen in silence, and was prostrate, as who should say, " My errand was for this." (Dante, *Paradise*, Cant. xii.)

ARS is a little village in the ancient principality of the Dombes, out of which has been formed the District of Trévoux. At the time M. Vianney came to take possession of his humble parish none of the roads which now connect it with the outer world existed. The houses were hardly to be descried amid a medley of fruit-trees ; they were dotted over the landscape without discernible plan, but more compactly in the vicinity of the church. The place presents an air of melancholy, which is the peculiar stamp of the villages hereabouts and perhaps accounts for the peaceable habits of the villagers. Low hills, woody dales, a feeble water-course or two which take their trifling contribution to the Saône, a few hamlets here and there, isolated farms connected by paths winding among the bushes, so exactly alike that one must needs be an old inhabitant to be able to tell one from another : such is the general aspect of the place. Generally speaking the surface is an undulating prairie-land with ploughed fields surrounded by hedges.

Ars is hidden in a fold of the country watered by the Fontblin, the muddy and sluggish waters of which crawl sleepily between two rows of alders that lean arch-wise over its bed. This streamlet separates the village from the château which, in the shade of a group of elms, is partly visible through a screen of poplars. Approaching Ars from the south the first thing that meets the eye is the noble mansion. It has—in its severe style and massive brick walls—something suggestive of the feudal keep and monastery of former times that recalls past ages and harmonises well with the church tower, also of the same period.

The population of the parish is entirely agricultural. We do not find here the brisk and lively race of the banks of the Saône. But, on the other hand, the people do not belong to the cold lymphatic type usual among the small farmers whose life-energies are being sapped by the unhealthy exhalations of the pools of the Dombes. The affection and veneration with which these people

have ever surrounded their pastor shows that they are capable of forming strong attachments and remaining faithful to them.

Since the first days of the restoration of public worship Ars had been fortunate enough to be provided with a curé. The Abbé Berger remained at the head of this flock until the year 1817, when M. Courbon, desiring to entrust a more important post to his care, transferred him to Sury-le-Comtal, a considerable parish of Forez. He left his congregation regretfully and, as he passed the boundary of the parish, looked back and bestowed on it a tearful benediction. Between this benediction and the arrival of M. Vianney came the brief apostolate of M. Place. This good priest practically only appeared to a congregation which had no time to appreciate him ; for he died of a chest complaint after a residence of only a few months.

It was on the 9th February—at the beginning of Lent, 1818—that the Abbé Vianney came to assume his new duties. He arrived after the manner of the apostles of old—having “ neither staff, nor scrip, nor bread, nor money.” (Luke ix, 13.) His little effects followed him, however. They included the bequests of his holy Curé—a bedstead and coverlets. His charity soon despoiled him of the coverlets ; and his ingenious mortification replaced them by arrangements which M. Balley himself would have failed to recognise.

It is said that at first sight of the roofs of his parish—he was right in the midst of them before he realised the fact—he fell on his knees to implore the blessing of God upon it. In later years someone, marvelling at the wealth of divine favours that had descended on Ars, asked him if this story was true. “ It is not a bad idea,” replied he. This was his usual way of making an admission which would have wounded his humility in any degree.

Another story is to the effect that he had much difficulty in locating the village ; and would not have been able to find it had it not been for the assistance of a little shepherd. Those who revel in presentiments and delight to see in incidents of this sort the visible hand of Providence, remarked that his guide on this occasion was the first to follow their holy Curé to the tomb ; as if the good God had decreed that M. Vianney should show the way to eternity to the man who had shown him the way to his parish.

Thanks to the pains their new pastor took to conceal his virtues, Ars would perhaps have long remained in ignorance of the treasure heaven had sent it. But numerous visitors from Écully, who could hardly resign themselves to the loss of their Vicaire, came to tell the tale of the blank his departure had left among them. Moreover there were some things that could not be hidden and appeared in spite of himself—his lively faith, his devotion at the altar, his recollection in prayer. They had no sooner seen him celebrate Mass than there was a universal chorus : “ Have you noticed our new Curé ? how fervently he prays ? how holy he is ?

This is not an ordinary man ; there is something altogether extraordinary about him ; they have sent us a saint."

Among good Catholics there is a very true perception of what is noble and beautiful in their holy religion. This is especially true of the man who lives in the country. Under a rough exterior is often found, not only a delicate tact but also a remarkable power of discernment. When it is a question of weighing merit his sound sense and simple principles are rarely at fault. He readily accepts the religion of his priest and the reality of his virtue when the solid guarantees of piety and prayer are duly forthcoming. He sees in his curé a person set apart and above others and for him the priest is, before everything else, a man of intercession and sacrifice.

M. Vianney, in receiving a vocation at the hand of Almighty God, had also received the grace to understand aright the duties implied ; and his every endeavour was directed to conform himself to the ideal of what a Christian priest should be. Herein lay his claim to the esteem and veneration of the faithful ; and it was the only means he employed to gain their confidence. What other means had he ? Nature had done little or nothing for him ; she had been very sparing in the bestowal of those exterior advantages which are sometimes an auxiliary to virtue, and which, when borne with modest dignity and sustained by more solid qualities, unquestionably make for good. He had none of the graces of youth, his face was pale and angular, his body frail, stature below medium, his walk heavy, his manner timid and embarrassed—a very commonplace personage, with nothing in his outward appearance to attract attention save his evident asceticism and the exceptional penetration of his glance ; and no one was more conscious of his lack of natural gifts than M. Vianney himself.

At the same time his knowledge of his own deficiencies, mental and bodily, did not discourage him in any way. Discouragement is a defect born of pride, which rises in weak souls from an excessive confidence in their own powers and lack of confidence in God. The Curé of Ars expected nothing from himself but everything from God ; therefore he devoted himself with so much the more ardour to piety—convinced that, without it, nature's choicest gifts are wasted, while, without any of them, piety can work wonders.

From the day of his arrival he chose the church for his dwelling-place. There he was seen to pass long hours, prostrate in the middle of the sanctuary and absolutely motionless. One would have said that—in his own words—he was *bathing* in the flames of divine love which issued from the tabernacle on the altar. He came before dawn and did not leave till after the *Angelus* in the evening. If he was wanted they had to go there to find him ; and there they always were certain of finding him. " Several

have said to me," says Catherine, " ' How we love to watch M. le Curé in the church, especially in the early morning when he says his prayers. Before commencing and during the recitation of his Office, he looks at the tabernacle with a smile which does one good to see.' I have noticed the same several times myself ; one would almost say he sees our Lord. I am oppressed with a sense of my own spiritual poverty in the presence of God, when I contemplate, by the glimmer of the sanctuary lamp, that lean and emaciated form, that radiant gaze which fixes itself on the tabernacle with an expression of happiness impossible to describe."

The MSS. of the Abbé Renard give the impressions of a young seminarian, who was privileged to recite the Divine Office several times with M. Vianney. " His tender and affectionate piety had nothing singular or extravagant ; it came quite naturally from his heart—like water from a mountain spring—and with a sweetness and angelic suavity. Everything did not appear externally ; but it was easy to see that the fountain only yielded of its abundance. . . . I could not restrain my tears when long sighs escaped that body, so exhausted by fasting ; and above all when he raised his eyes to heaven. I blushed to see myself so cold ; then, suddenly, grace reproached me interiorly and took me out of myself ; thenceforth I had only one desire—to imitate his piety and fervour."

M. Vianney, as has been already said, lived entirely in the church : he passed whole days and part of his nights there. Consequently, domestic arrangements, the furnishing of his room and anything that might make the place more comfortable became superfluous and remained unattended to. Thus the presbytery at Ars began to assume the neglected aspect that has impressed so many visitors—visitors who have thought themselves happy in being allowed to tread the dust upon its staircase. It was evident that someone lived there ; but one would have been tempted to think it was the dwelling-place of a spirit, so very remarkable was the absence of all that are usually considered to be necessities of life.

For the rest, nothing escaped the watchful eyes of his parishioners ; and every day they found some new cause for edification. What need had they of the reports of those whose good fortune it had been to possess their Curé before themselves ? When their confidence and regret drew to his confessional at Ars all those whom he had directed at Écully, the people of Ars said to them—like the compatriots of the woman of Samaria : " We now believe, not for thy saying : for we ourselves have heard him." (John iv., 42.)

CHAPTER XI

DEBUT OF M. VIANNEY AT ARS. HIS RELATIONS WITH HIS PARISHIONERS. MADEMOISELLE D'ARS

And he fed them in the innocence of his heart : and conducted them by the skilfulness of his hands. (Ps. lxxvii., 72.)

It is a lesser matter to hold the reins of temporal power than to wield spiritual authority ; inasmuch as it is not so excellent to impose obedience by force as to obtain voluntary submission : and because the authority of a spiritual ruler is that of a father. It is exercised with paternal kindness and, though what is enjoined may be far-reaching, it is imposed by no other method than that of persuasion. (St. John Chrys., in *Ep. ii.*, ad. *Cor.*, *Hom.* 15.)

THE details of the first few years of M. Vianney's apostolate are not less interesting than those of the latter part of it. Unfortunately most of them have been lost—they have passed with the passing of those under whose observation they occurred. Still, a few have been preserved and will serve to illustrate the career of one of the most remarkable men of the nineteenth century.

M. Vianney took possession of his parish with joy tempered by humility. In the vast field of the Great Husbandman, the corner assigned to him was insignificant but, in his eyes, it was far greater than he deserved ; and when he regarded the roofs and fields of his dear parish from the surrounding hills, his heart overflowed with gratitude at the thought that he had been deemed worthy to lead these souls to God. He desired nothing better than to gather them to himself, as a hen gathers her chickens under her wing ; he embraced them in spirit, promising to love and be faithful to them, to seek nothing beyond them ; they would furnish alike his sorrows and his joys.

His joys, alas ! were slow to arrive. Ars was then very far from being the exemplary parish that we have seen it. There, as in other parts of the Dombes, many souls languished in a state of indifference which, owing to a low standard of intelligence and the necessity of continual hard work, produced a state of things as distressing as it was difficult to deal with.

Here is the picture presented to us by the notes of Catherine Lassagne : “ The parish of Ars was, at the date of the arrival of M. le Curé, in the very greatest spiritual destitution. Virtue was but little known and hardly practised at all. Nearly everyone had forsaken the right path ; that is to say, neglected the care of their soul and their eternal salvation. The young had not an idea beyond pleasure and amusement. Every Sunday, or oftener, they all assembled in the square near the church or at the village cabarets, according to the season, there to give themselves up to dancing and every sort of diversion.”

The elders confirm this testimony ; they agree that the young

people of this part of the country, more than elsewhere, enjoyed a thoroughly well earned reputation for devotion to pleasure, to which they yielded with a boisterous and senseless delight that knew neither reserve nor restraint.

None will ever know how much the holy priest suffered from this state of affairs, nor how his sorrow at it increased day by day. Here he was to spend his life and here, at the very outset, the futility of his ministry was becoming plain. And the good Curé was often moved to tears at the follies and faithlessness of his people—just as his Master had been over an ungrateful Jerusalem. But M. Vianney, while recognising to the full the difficulty of his undertaking, believed he could bring about the reformation of his parish by the might of prayer before the throne of God.

Thenceforth he resolved to pass his days and nights in imploring that the divine mercy might descend and convert the hearts of his parishioners.

It must not be supposed that the continued presence of the Curé of Ars in the church caused him to neglect the other important duties of his office. Of all the tasks imposed on man here below the most difficult is, without doubt, the management of souls. Princes may control the external actions of their subjects, but they cannot command their souls ; and, from this point of view, their work is easy compared with that of the least among the clergy.

To purify souls, enlighten, console and lead them to will the highest and most difficult things, to rescue them from the tyranny of passion and the fascination of the false joys of earth, in order to induce them to live the life that is in Christ Jesus ; such is the mission of the priest in the world. And, for the fulfilment of this noblest of missions, there are but two means ; preaching and prayer—the right to speak to men about the good God and the duty of speaking to God about the good of men.

Already we have seen the Curé of Ars have recourse to the second of these means, as one profoundly convinced of his own insufficiency—assured that he is nothing, can do nothing and knows nothing ; that God alone is all and can do all and that He always answers the prayers of such as call upon Him faithfully. But from the very first the Curé of Ars associated prayer with the zealous preaching of the Word of God. To this latter he attached a sovereign importance ; and to his preparation for it he devoted, as to a duty of the first order, all the time left from the performance of his own spiritual duties. To this end he spared no pains, that he might be able to deliver his message to his congregation with all the force and eloquence at his command. He never suffered himself to say : What use is there in thinking beforehand of what I shall say ? My congregation are nothing but peasants ; I can always manage to say enough for them. In those peasants he saw souls ; souls precious in the sight of God ; souls our Lord

has always loved; souls for whom He gave His life; and consequently that each and every one has a right to be treated with respect.

Instructed by the great doctors of the first centuries, who never, even after the composition of their learned works, imagined themselves to be exempt from applying themselves yet more to the evangelisation of their churches, and whom we hear of in their solitude, poring over the pages of Holy Scripture which they were about to expound to their people the following Sunday, M. Vianney shut himself in his sacristy for whole days at a time to compose his sermons. When he had written them out he would deliver them alone and without any hearers, as if he had been in the pulpit.

It may be that this practice was suggested to him by the vivid recollections a certain Italian bishop had left behind him in the country around Ars. Deported to France at the same time as Pius VII., the illustrious exile had chosen Trévoux as his residence and he had taken the village of Ars to his heart, no doubt on account of the pleasure he found in the society of the Vicomte d'Ars; and thither he frequently directed his solitary walks. But he brought no more than his bodily presence to Ars; in spirit he ever remained in the midst of his flock so far away—piously united with them in prayer and thought. What fervent prayers ascended from his lips in that little church at Ars. But here is something more affecting still. Sometimes it happened that he would lock himself into the church; then, ascending the pulpit, he would preach as to an invisible auditory. Asked, one day, for an explanation of this proceeding which appeared—at the very least—remarkable, he replied: "Do not let it astonish you. In place of my beloved diocesans I have the angels of God for my listeners; and they will carry my words to them."

A worthy bishop this! God seemed to have permitted his prolonged sojourn in a foreign land for no other end than that he might be, like Joseph, the benefactor of a people who did not belong to him, as well as his own. For years after the population who witnessed the austere dignity with which he supported the trials of exile, venerated his memory; and who can tell whether his example was not one of the sources whence the piety of that young Curé drew its inspiration, who, four years later, came to pray and preach in the same place where the Bishop of Nocera had prayed and preached himself.

For the good priest there is another apostolate besides that of the pulpit: the apostolate of conversation—that opportune apostolate that finds an outlet for its zeal by the wayside, in the fields, beside the family hearth or at the bedside of the sick. Impossible to count the number of souls led back to God by this manner of preaching—especially when the preacher is regarded with good-will. The Abbé Vianney understood that he would not

begin to effect good among his parishioners until he had made them love him ; and there is a secret for doing this which the Curé of Ars possessed—he loved them.

At the first sight of the soul of man as it really is, many are cast down and ask themselves and others : What is to be done to make men better ? The answer is writ large upon every page of the Gospel : Love them ; love them in spite of everything and love them always. God has decreed that no good shall be worked in man's heart save by those who love their fellow-men. " The world belongs to him who loves it most and will prove it best." The entire life of M. Vianney was a striking illustration of this. He has held, so to speak, a multitude of souls in his hand ; he has seen more at his feet—because he loved them all and loved them much.

And he loved his parishioners from the first. Hardly had he been installed in their midst, than he wished to see everyone, know everyone, and that everyone should be happier because he was there ; he would make himself all things to all men, that he might gain all to Jesus Christ. This is the highest duty of a priest ; and he never thought he had done enough. His charity thought of everything, understood how to make use of everything. He would not rest content with those vague relations in which the priest, being the friend of everybody in the mass is the friend of nobody in the individual ; and he seized upon the least occasion to give each member of his flock some sign of his esteem and personal devotedness, in such sort that each of them came to think he was the only object of his pastor's regard. Open, complaisant and affable to all, without descending from his dignity or forgetting he was a priest, he would not meet a child in the street without stopping to say a few kind words. All know how much this is appreciated by country-folk.

The visitation of his parishioners occupied him to a certain extent. He was not content to go only when he was asked ; he went whether he was asked or no ; but always with great discretion and biding his time till a favourable opportunity should present itself. He called, for choice, at the hour of the family meal when all were certain to be at home. To avoid either surprise or embarrassment he announced himself from the doorway, addressing the master of the house familiarly by his Christian name ; then, entering, he signed all present to continue their meal in a manner that admitted of no demur. Casually leaning against the mantelpiece, he would ask for news of the family and their affairs ; and gradually and gracefully turn the conversation on to spiritual matters. The basis of his conversation was drawn from his assiduous study of the lives of the saints. He had a special faculty for observing points or events that another would not have noticed or understood ; and was always listened to with a reverent attention. When he took his departure his visit had

not only charmed everyone, but instructed, consoled and elevated them. Next to divine grace, what gives the greatest efficacy to pious conversation is the sanctity of the speaker; and, from that time on, such was the power of his sanctity that numerous conversions resulted from these simple visits alone.

In this place something must be said of the principal parishioner of Ars, one who was not only a great source of consolation to her Curé, but also a means of rendering his ministry more fruitful. At the time when he was commencing his apostolic labours with such abundance of zeal and so little promise of success, the Château d'Ars was the abode of one of those great ladies of former days, who seem to have been born not only to adorn the highest society but also to refine and elevate it--a type only too rare in our own times.

Mademoiselle d'Ars, daughter of Comte Louis Garnier d'Ars, an officer of the French Guards, and Mademoiselle Dupré de Saint-Maure, was already sixty years of age. Thanks to the solicitude of a most virtuous mother, she had been surrounded in her childhood by every influence that can make for good and had received the benediction of many a personage in renown for sanctity. Possessed of the great grace of natural goodness, the lessons of the Gospel made their way to her heart almost without instruction. At the famous school of St. Cyr,* where she was brought up, she studied the works of Bossuet, Fénelon and St. Francis of Sales to such good effect that when she left she was already a pattern of Christian virtue. At the period where she enters into this history, age had but matured and fortified her pious dispositions.

In person Mademoiselle d'Ars was small and full of grace and vivacity. Natural and dignified in manner, she was endowed with a remarkable wit which lent additional charm to her recollections of the past, of which she seemed to be a living chronicle. Extreme kindness of heart induced in her an almost unbounded tolerance towards others, while her angelic piety commanded universal respect. She was, in short, one of those heroic Christians whose presence and example inspire those around them with the desire to save their own souls. A few lines from a letter written in 1830 will complete the portrait by showing Mademoiselle d'Ars as she appeared to her contemporaries:—

"The mistress of the château is unique in her own order. Tranquil of soul, she carries an air of fine weather and blue skies about her, even in the midst of storms and tempest. She is happy in having such a disposition, which must be the gift of

* This school was established at Versailles in 1686 by Madame de Maintenon for the education of young ladies of the nobility. "Its object," wrote Père La Chaise, S.J., "is not to multiply convents, but to give the State well-educated women. There are plenty of good nuns but not a sufficient number of good mothers of families."

God. It is not the reward of sacrifice made or victory achieved, neither is it transitory or artificial : it is a habit of every day and all day. She has no need to seek it in past memories or future hopes ; the past and future do but serve for her to brighten the present . . . If the aspect of our France has lately cast a gloom over her outwardly, inwardly she remains calm and sanguine . . . To the most sinister forebodings and the most unexpected alarms she does but reply with a simple '*O mon Dieu!*' and, having thus committed her presentiments and fears to the care of heaven, pursues the even tenor of her way."

We may add that Mademoiselle d'Ars was a most perfect mistress in her own house and excelled in all those duties commended in Holy Writ—duties which are the special prerogative of her sex and which, when carried out, constitute excellence as the world understands it. It was also the privilege of the Château d'Ars to perpetuate the traditions of the ages of faith—in which religion formed an integral part of the life of the rich and great and flourished in its most attractive form in their homes. Then as now, the château breathed an atmosphere of times past ; all was regulated as in a convent and everyone, mistress and maid alike, worked with their hands the thing that is good.

Belonging by birth and education to the highest society, Mademoiselle d'Ars nevertheless lived a life of extreme seclusion ; dividing her time between her own spiritual duties and those for the welfare of others. Thus she was as remote from the world and as disengaged from its petty tyrannies as if she had lived in a cloister.

Her mode of life was simplicity itself. Always the first to rise, she assembled her household for prayer and spiritual reading in common ; she did the same before retiring at night. Every day she assisted at the Mass of her Curé, going and coming on foot at all seasons and in any weather. And, on her return home, she was always much more concerned that her old servant, the good and faithful St. Phal, should be warmed and rested than she was to take care of herself.

One day when she came to Mass in deep snow, M. Vianney, moved at her condition, ventured to remark : " Mademoiselle, you really ought to have a carriage." " My good Curé," replied she, " I have worked out what it would cost me ; it is a good round sum ; and that would mean so much less for the poor."

Mademoiselle d'Ars recited the canonical Hours every day with St. Phal. This may perhaps excite astonishment in a world oblivious of its highest duties and unaccustomed to prayer ; but one needs but to go back a hundred years to find the breviary in general use in the lay-world among persons of a certain position with any pretensions to piety. Many an idle life has been saved by it from chronic boredom, which is the blight of the soul and one of the evils of our time.



Villard-Verne. Phot., Ars (Ain).

Le Château d'Ars.

The Château d'Ars was not only a house of prayer ; it was an asylum for those in misfortune, the refuge for the suffering, hospital, bank and " Hôtel Dieu " generally, for the whole countryside. Mademoiselle d'Ars kept her expenses well below her income and thus found means to satisfy her inexhaustible charity. To give was the passion of her life. Her alms took many and varied directions : Villefranche shared largely in them ; and numerous families in the poorest quarters of that manufacturing town received from her every year the wherewithal for their rent.

But mere giving was by no means sufficient—there is but a very mediocre satisfaction in giving when one has the means—she did more, by devoting herself to work—rough, hard and incessant work. Following the example of other illustrious ladies whose devotion carried them so far as to make the beds of the poor, prepare their food, collect their ragged clothes to wash and mend them with their own hands, Mademoiselle d'Ars was unceasingly occupied in making clothes of all sorts for the old men, the women and their babies—she knew the circumstances and needs of everyone in the neighbourhood by heart. She was always careful to reserve the hardest and most uninviting tasks for herself ; for she felt that work, in proportion as it is more humble and painful, is a means of sanctification which operates, so to speak, after the manner of a sacrament.

Such was this admirable woman Mademoiselle d'Ars ; for whom high rank was nothing more than a stricter obligation to serve God, the Church and the poor. To her can fitly be applied the words in which Holy Scripture depicts the virtuous woman :—" She hath sought wool and flax, and hath wrought by the counsel of her hands. She is like the merchant's ship, she bringeth her bread from afar. And she hath risen in the night, and given a prey to her household, and victuals to her maidens . . . her lamp will not be put out in the night. She hath put out her hand to strong things, and her fingers have taken hold of the spindle. She hath opened her hand to the needy, and stretched out her hands to the poor . . . She hath looked well to the paths of her house, and hath not eaten her bread idle . . . Give her of the fruit of her hands : and let her works praise her in the gates." (Prov. xxxi., 13-31).

She was the first to be impressed with the eminent virtue of her holy Curé, as she called him ; the first to understand and rejoice at the inestimable present that heaven in its bounty had made to the parish of Ars. This is the account of her impressions a few days after the arrival of M. Vianney :—" We have lately lost M. Place, who was an excellent priest ; death has taken him in the prime of life ; he has been replaced at once. M. Courbon has sent us as Curé a M. Vianney, lately Vicairé of Écully. I have never known such a holy priest as our new Curé. He never leaves the church ; at the altar he is a seraph ; in the pulpit he

is not an orator like M. Berger but he is filled with the Spirit of God . . . He eats hardly anything. Pray God to sustain him and preserve him to us for many years. Were he to die it would be almost impossible to replace him."

Every year Mademoiselle d'Ars was accustomed to offer her Curé a bouquet of lilies on his feast-day. One day it happened that she could not do this as usual, on the eve ; so she took it to the sacristy on the day itself—the feast of St. John the Baptist. M. Vianney accepted the bouquet and after admiring the beauty of the flowers and their arrangement placed it on the window-sill. This window looks towards the south ; and the sun at this season of the year—24th June—would ordinarily wither them in a few hours. At the end of eight days the lilies were still fresh and retained their perfume. Called on to explain this singular occurrence, the Curé, lest it should be supposed to have anything to do with himself, took care to remark : " Mademoiselle d'Ars must be a saint, since her flowers keep fresh in this manner."

CHAPTER XII

REVIVAL OF RELIGION AT ARS. M. VIANNEY ESTABLISHES THE PERPETUAL ADORATION, THE PRACTICE OF FREQUENT COMMUNION, NIGHT PRAYERS IN PUBLIC, AND THE CONFRATERNITIES. VISIT OF THE VICOMTE D'ARS

He shall feed his flock like a shepherd : he shall gather together the lambs with his arm, and shall take them up in his bosom, and he himself shall carry them that are with young. (Is. xl., 11.)

To re-establish all things in Christ. (Eph. i., 10.)

ALL M. Vianney's ambition now centred itself on reviving the spirit of piety and devotion in his parish. To that end three means suggested themselves—all three authorised by the constant practice of the Church and the experience of men who have been most successful in the management of souls. The first is neither new nor unusual, having been established by Jesus Christ himself, to bind His Church together and cause her to pursue her way in sanctity—devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. This was the method employed by the saints, who all believed that renewal of piety was only to be effected by its help.

This it was that M. Olier employed in his reformation of the parish of St. Sulpice. Said this venerable man :—

“ The object of the Son of God in coming on earth was to communicate His divine life to men, in order that they might more nearly resemble Him. He begins this transformation by baptism ; but He completes and perfects it by the Holy Eucharist—that divine food which really imparts to us His true life and dispositions ; which causes us to participate in His adorable nature and makes us one with Him. He placed Himself in the Blessed Sacrament, thus to continue His mission to the end of the world ; and by this means to penetrate to the uttermost ends of the earth to call forth adorers for His Father in spirit and in truth . . . It is in this manner that He becomes the source of divine life, which is the vast source and bottomless ocean of the plenitude by which we are all sanctified.”

Thanks to the Blessed Sacrament, the Word made flesh has never ceased to dwell amongst us, always full of grace and truth. As in olden times, when the multitude of sick hung upon His footsteps that they might be healed by the virtue which proceeded from Him, so to-day, in like manner, the human race, that great spiritual sufferer, debilitated by the triple concupiscence which lies hidden in its heart, approaches Him in humble faith to obtain health of soul ; no longer by contact with His vesture, but by vivifying

contact with that virginal flesh which giveth life unto the world. Thither come the Magdalens, who pour out upon His feet their tears and their perfumes ; thither come the desolate mothers, who ask of Him the soul of their only son ; Canaanites, who implore Him to have pity on them ; Samaritan women, who enter into ineffable conversations, in which they learn to know the gift of God ; young men upon whom Jesus looks and looking loves ; and little children, borne in the arms of their mothers, that He may take them in His arms and bless them, as He did those other children who went before them.

In the dim light of the lamp which ever burns before the tabernacle man can kneel at any hour—to converse familiarly with his Creator, to discover to Him all the fears which agitate his heart ; the secret joys and sorrows that fill his soul ; prostrate himself in adoration, dedicate himself to Him and implore the divine benediction on his labours of head or hands—the benediction of the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief, who knows so well how to compassionate all human infirmity. Then, opening the treasury of His graces, the adored Master condescends to shower them upon those hearts which truly love Him : He enlightens, consoles and calms them ; strengthening them against the day of temptation, weaning them from the things of this world, that they may set their affections on those of the world to come.

This digression on the Real Presence on our part will perhaps be excused when it is remembered that this book has been written to perpetuate the memory of one to whom devotion to the Blessed Sacrament was everything—the secret of his sanctity, the last word of his life, and the means whereby he was enabled to save such a multitude of souls.

We return to M. Vianney. His first endeavour was to establish the perpetual adoration in his church. But how was it to be done, and where were adorers to be found ? When the Holy Ghost inspires, and His inspiration is accepted by a faithful soul, it is rare indeed to find circumstances so unpropitious that it cannot be carried into effect ; and, even though it be at present impossible that the impossibility can endure for long.

Mademoiselle d'Ars was not quite the only person to be drawn to our Lord in the solitude of His church. There lived then at Ars a good father of a family, a simple husbandman, a poor illiterate peasant, who was the joy of his pastor's heart ; and of whom we have heard him speak with tears, in his catechisms, again and again. Whether he went out to the fields or whether he returned from them, this excellent man never passed the church without going in. Leaving his tools at the door, he would pass long hours sitting or kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament. The Curé, who watched him with great delight, was surprised to notice that he could never detect the smallest movement of the lips of this man of prayer. So one day he approached him. " My good father,

what is it you say to our Lord during the long visits you pay Him, every day and several times a day?" "I say nothing: I look at Him and He looks at me." A beautiful and sublime reply. This good man never opened a book—indeed he knew not how to read; but he had not only eyes in his body, he had also eyes in his soul—the eyes of faith; and through them he saw his Lord and Master.

Besides Mademoiselle d'Ars there was another person who assisted at Mass and the recitation of the rosary in the evening. This was a good widow, who lived in a cottage near the church and kept house for the Curé. Then, to complete the little group of pious souls, Providence permitted that a person who was well-known in Lyons, attracted no doubt by the reputation M. Vianney had acquired when Vicaire of Écully, should come to establish herself at Ars. This was unhopèd-for good fortune, for which the young Curé devoutly thanked heaven. The dream of his life was to be accomplished; his Lord would no longer be alone; a little court was provided for Him.

Mademoiselle Pignaut made the acquaintance of the good widow on arrival, and proposed to share her cottage. What mattered the size or poverty of the place? She desired to finish her life, already three-parts over, like Mary, in prayer and contemplation. This saintly woman had some means, and as she limited her expenses to what was strictly necessary, she was able to spend what she saved in good works. Her delight was to dispense her alms by the hands of her Curé, who drew on her at sight; "Come," he would say, "I have need of five francs; give them to me at once." And she would do so cheerfully. This was the commencement of a civil list which we shall presently see attain miraculous figures.

Thus, in the little church at Ars, lately abandoned like so many other poor country churches, two adorers were to be found at any hour of the day—one in the sanctuary, the other in the Lady chapel. Mademoiselle d'Ars appeared there too, as also the good widow; but the duties of their respective positions did not admit of the same assiduity on their part.

The day was begun by the offering of the Holy Sacrifice, and ended with the recitation of the rosary and night prayers in common. It was impossible that so edifying a spectacle should be lost on those who witnessed it. Good is contagious as well as evil. Day by day M. Vianney had the consolation of seeing a greater number of sheep—fugitives, up to now—return to the fold. This nucleus was still further increased by the accession of strangers who one by one came to live at Ars.

M. Vianney was unknown; nobody ever spoke of the Curé of Ars in the world outside, yet already it seemed that some secret influence attracted to him souls that hungered and thirsted after justice; and pointed out the church which this good priest had

filled with the odour of his prayers as the place to which they should repair to adore their God in spirit and in truth.

The little gathering in the evening was not slow to assume the proportions of a public service, in which an ever-increasing number of the villagers took part. It was announced by sound of the church bell. The joy of the pastor was full as, at the close of the day, he saw numerous groups, representatives of every family in the place, make their way towards the church ; there to lay aside for a moment the cares of their laborious life. From that time, M. Vianney never failed to preside at this exercise : that is to say, he never slept a single night outside his parish, save only the time he gave to the evangelisation of the villages in the vicinity, of which we shall hear more presently.

His pressing exhortations from the pulpit, to a better frequentation of the sacraments, helped to accelerate and extend the movement. How often did he cry, in speaking of the great Sacrament of the love of Christ :—" Ah ! my brethren, had we only the eyes of angels, to see our Lord Jesus Christ, who is here present on the altar ; and who beholds us thence : how much we should love Him. We should never wish to separate from Him ; we should wish to remain always at His feet : it would be a foretaste of heaven ; everything beside would appear insipid to us. But there ! . . it is our faith that is deficient. We are poor blind folk ; we have a mist before our eyes . . . Only faith can dissipate this mist . . . presently, my brethren, when I take our Lord in my hands : when the good God blesses you, ask Him to open the eyes of your soul ; say to Him, like the blind man of Jericho : ' Lord, that I may see.' If you sincerely ask of Him : ' Lord, that I may see,' you will certainly obtain what you ask ; because He only wishes for your welfare. He has His hands full of graces, and seeks only for someone on whom to bestow them : alas ! and no one wants them . . . oh ! indifference ! oh ! ingratitude ! . . We shall understand indeed one day ; but it will be too late . . ." Here tears choked his utterance ; and his hearers were equally affected.

Another object which he pursued without relaxation, was the leading of his parishioners to a more frequent use of the sacraments. He had enjoyed this triumph at Écully ; where he had come to see the Holy Table continually thronged : at Ars it was far otherwise. People came to Holy Communion at the great festivals : such was the custom of most of the mothers of families and young girls, when the love of dancing was not too strong for them ; but the simple and vital practice of frequent Communion was here unknown. The zealous pastor lamented : " I have nothing to do here ; I fear I shall lose my soul . . . Ah ! if I could once see our divine Saviour known and loved. If I could only administer His most sacred Body to a great number of faithful every day, how happy should I be." This consolation was

soon to arrive. The same persons who had rendered night prayers in common and the perpetual adoration possible, served him to attain the desired result.

Already Mademoiselle d'Ars knelt often at the communion-rails; she became more assiduous thenceforth. Mademoiselle Pignaut came nearly every day. Seized with a noble emulation, and led by the touching appeals they heard from the pulpit and in the confessional, the pious widow already mentioned, and several other thoughtful persons, followed this example; and so well that, in a very short time, a new germ of sanctity, and the most fruitful one, was planted in this ground that had seemed given over to sterility.

It is clear that the teaching of M. Vianney was not that of certain doctors of his time. He was of the school of St. Alphonsus Liguori, St. Francis of Sales, of St. Vincent de Paul, and all the saints. He believed, with all tradition, that the adorable Eucharist is the *daily* bread that we ask of God in the Lord's Prayer. Tertullian, in explaining these words, says: "The Body of Jesus Christ is here referred to, which is present under the form of bread; and that, in asking our daily bread, we ask to be perpetually with Jesus Christ and never to be separated from His Body." (*De Orat., c. vi.*) "If it be daily bread," says St. Ambrose, "why do you eat it only once a year? Receive Him every day, so that every day He may sustain you. He that is not worthy to receive Him every day is not worthy to receive Him at the end of a year." (*De Sacram., Bk. V., ch. iv., v. 25*). "If Jesus Christ gives Himself to us," says Fénelon, "under the appearance of bread which is the most ordinary food of man, it is to familiarise us with His risen and glorified Body." (*Letter on Frequent Communion*). Again, St. John Chrysostom: "Temerity does not consist in approaching the Lord's Table too often, but in approaching it unworthily, were it only once in the course of a lifetime . . . that it is purity of conscience which is the criterion as to the time to approach it . . . that for the truly faithful the Pasch continues the entire year." (*Hom. VI., in I. Tim.*)

M. Vianney, too, recalled the fact that, in the beginning, the practice of the first Christians—reliable interpreters of the Master's intentions—had followed close on the institution of the Sacrament. "And they were persevering . . . in the communion of the breaking of bread . . . with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house." (*Acts ii, 42-6*). Tradition teaches us that this communion of the breaking of bread was the participation in the Holy Eucharist. "Critics," says Fénelon, "would appeal to antiquity; they have their answer . . . Where shall we find a purer and more ancient Christianity than that of the Acts of the Apostles and St. Paul?" (*Letter on Frequent Communion*).

The Curé of Ars was mindful that, in one of their canons, the

holy Council of Trent expressed the formal desire that the faithful who assist at Mass should communicate thereat, not only in spirit and desire, but by the sacramental reception of the Eucharist, so that they may receive a more abundant fruit from the Holy Sacrifice.

Again, he was convinced by all he had seen and heard, that the Holy Eucharist is the foundation of Christian life ; the secret of all the marvels of faith, abnegation and devotion, which the Catholic religion always induces, under the eyes of a world so much accustomed to, that it has ceased to be astonished at it—the fire which kindles the disinterestedness of apostles, the constancy of martyrs, the generosity of confessors, the purity of virgins.

“Come to Communion, my brethren (said he), come to Jesus with love and confidence ! Come, live on Him that you may live for Him. Do not say you have too much to do. Has not your divine Lord said : ‘Come to me, you that labour and can do no more, and I will refresh you’ ? Can you resist an invitation so full of tenderness and affection ? Do not say you are not worthy. It is true that you are not worthy ; but you have need of Him. If our Lord had had our merits in view, He had never instituted this wonderful Sacrament of His love, for nobody on earth is worthy of it, neither saints, nor the angels, archangels, not even the Blessed Virgin herself . . . but He only regarded our needs and we all have need of Him. Do not urge that you are sinners, that you have too many troubles, and for that reason you dare not approach Him. You might just as well say that you are too sick, and therefore you do not wish to see the doctor.”

On another occasion he said :—

“My brethren, every being in creation must be nourished if it is to live : and that is why the good God made the trees and plants to grow—a well-furnished table, whence every animal takes the food that suits it. But the soul must also have her nourishment. Where then is her nourishment to be found ? My brethren, the nourishment of the soul is God Himself. What a beautiful thought is this . . . The soul can only find her nourishment in God. It is only God who can satisfy her. It is only God who can fill the soul. God alone can satiate her hunger. The soul has an absolute need of God. In every home there is a place where the family provisions are kept—the store-room. The Church is the home of souls : the home of us Christians. Well then. In this house there is a store-room. You see the tabernacle there ? If anyone should ask of the souls of Christians : What is that yonder ? your soul would answer : It is the store-room.”*

* These words are literal, as far as is possible. The Curé of Ars had a language all his own ; and this language is unfortunately untranslatable : but the idea is there ; and as far as we have been able to reproduce them the form and colouring also.

Such, in substance, were the instructions M. Vianney gave his people, to kindle in their hearts the desire and love of the Holy Eucharist. He never thought work in the fields and the cares of a household to be incompatible with frequent Communion—as if work offered to God, and sanctified by the spirit of faith, prayer and sacrifice, were not the best of all preparations. In this he followed the teaching of St. Augustine: “Would you always give glory to God? Then, always do well what you do at all; and you will always have given glory to God.” Nor did he evince an exaggerated severity in the conditions he demanded; he never asked the impossible. If he found a feeble soul, one that distrusted its own weakness; an imperfect soul, lamenting its imperfections and struggling to correct them, he endeavoured to form the interior life of that soul; after which he counselled recourse to the bread of heaven to strengthen it.

There remained a third means of sanctification for his people, and one no less dear than the others to the zeal of the indefatigable pastor: the erection of confraternities. Among those most encouraged by the Church are two that have the sanction of immemorial usage and the approval of the Holy See, as well as the high esteem of the faithful: the Confraternity of the Rosary and that of the Blessed Sacrament. The Curé called these to his assistance: by the first he would attract the mothers and daughters; by the second he hoped to capture the men and boys, draw them to the church, assemble them about the altar, unite and discipline them.

We have already seen a few of the more devout souls join in the night prayers and rosary; but there were very many who did not appear as yet—young people, whose flightiness distressed him; and it was these that the Curé now proposed to pursue—armed with the weapon of St. Dominic. Heaven very soon provided an opportunity of marking down his quarry. One Sunday, after Vespers, several girls—and not the most fervent among them—remained in the church to make their confessions. The Curé, as usual, was in the choir; and noticed them out of the corner of his eye. “This time,” said he, “I have them: here is my Confraternity ready made.” When they gathered round the confessional, he approached: “My children, we will, if you please, recite the rosary together, to beg the Queen of heaven to obtain for you the grace of doing well what you are about to do.” He began the prayers, to which they responded. Nothing more was necessary. “From that evening,” says Catherine, “may be dated the conversion of several of them. One—and the most devoted to amusement—has often owned to me that she was so moved, not to say disconcerted, when M. le Curé proposed that they should recite the rosary, that she could hardly remember the words. ‘I am convinced,’ added she, ‘it was at that moment he obtained my conversion.’ And indeed, she afterwards became an example to her companions.”

This was the first victory of the Curé of Ars. The parish changed its aspect ; virtue took the place of vice, and devotion once more re-asserted itself. The transformation did not come about instantaneously : if the times had need of grace, so grace itself had need of time. Each of M. Vianney's victories was the reward of a patience, longanimity and zeal proof against any disappointment. The ground was only cleared and fertilised by slow degrees and with great labour. The difficulty with the young women was not so much to get them to the confessional as to get them to give up dancing. This cost more, but they did it—little by little, one by one. Accordingly, as they gave up the practice M. Vianney invited them to spend Sunday evening in the presbytery garden, which he never used himself otherwise. There, while a ball went madly on in the square outside, he would talk to them of the good God, read from the Lives of the Saints, or they would practise singing for the church and generally encourage one another in well-doing.

The Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament originated about the same time. A goodly number of men hastened to respond to the appeal made to them, the heads of the most influential families setting the example. "Men," said the good Curé, "have souls to be saved as well as women. They take the lead in everything else, why should they not lead in this matter too—lead others to serve God and do homage to His Son in the great Sacrament of His love? Devotion gains much more in influence when it is practised by the men."

By this time there was a very considerable sensation at all that was taking place at Ars, and the fame of the Curé of Ars began to spread abroad outside his own parish. Heaven vouchsafed him further encouragement about this time—the spring of 1819—in the friendship he formed with the brother of Mademoiselle d'Ars.

The Vicomte d'Ars lived in Paris, where he moved not only in ecclesiastical circles but also in those of the best society in which piety was held in repute. When he arrived at Ars his first visit was to the Curé, whose appearance struck him as so extraordinary that he had no doubt but that he stood in the presence of a saint. During his stay at the château he had frequent interviews with M. Vianney. They locked themselves into the sacristy, these two, and there spent hours together—hours that seemed like glimpses of heaven to both, so much had they in common. Souls which have chosen the better part and love their Master above and beyond all things else have a mysterious affinity which leads them to seek one another—like elements of the same nature which tend to combine. They feel instinctively that they are well-met ; confidence is established between them ; and they understand each other as though they already enjoyed that supernatural insight by which one day, transfigured, we shall be able to

communicate with others by vision without the necessity of speech.

If M. Vianney was a priest after God's own heart, the Vicomte d'Ars was one of those men who are becoming rarer with each succeeding generation. Such noble figures are now only to be heard of in the obscurity of the past—they are little more than a tradition to-day. M. d'Ars spent his mornings with God and his evenings with the poor. In the church he served every Mass that was said while he was there ; to the homes of the poor he went not with alms alone, but alms accompanied by sympathy and Christian cordiality. Neither did he shrink from sitting down in the wretched lodgings that sheltered the misery of the poor of the capital. House-to-house visitation of the poor was not as yet included in the scheme of Catholic charity. The Vicomte d'Ars was thus a forerunner of those admirable conferences of St. Vincent de Paul which, by substituting the kindly action of Christian charity for the emotionless routine of the law, by appearing before the poor in the guise, not of the cold and formal official of state, but in that of a benefactor—one who takes more account of moral misery than material discomfort—have done so much to bring about the reconciliation of ranks and classes and to effect a social revolution.

The day after his arrival at Ars the old gentleman made the round of the village. He visited every house, sitting down in each ; had a kind word for all, shaking the hand of the old man, caressing the small child, leaving the poor the better for his alms, and everyone delighted with his goodness. The day before he left witnessed the same visits, the same largesses of heart and hand. " Oh, how pleased I am to have made the acquaintance of M. le Vicomte," said the holy Curé. " What a good man he is ! How much he loves the good God ! How imperfect I seem, compared with him." " What a treasure is this humble priest," said M. d'Ars, in turn. " He is not learned, but he is much better than if he were. How I envy the lot of my sister ! How glad I should be to live in the shadow of his virtues. What a privileged village is Ars . . . To please the holy man, to have a share of his prayers, there is nothing I would not do—even though it cost me half my fortune." The sequel will show this to have been no mere figure of speech, but that these generous dispositions were really sincere on the part of the Vicomte d'Ars. When he went to take leave he solicited from the Abbé Vianney the favour of being associated with his prayers and good works, and asked his blessing.

CHAPTER XIII

HOW M. VIANNEY LABOURED TO REFORM ABUSES. ABOLITION OF DANCES AND SUPPRESSION OF THE CABARETS. SANCTIFICATION OF THE SABBATH

And he gave him power in his commandments, in the covenants of his judgments, that he should teach Jacob his testimonies, and give light to Israel in his law. (Ecclus. xiv., 21.)

Lo, I have set thee . . . to root up, and to pull down, to waste, and to destroy, and to build and to plant. (Jer. i., 10.)

M. VIANNEY had recruited a contingent of well-disposed individuals: he was no longer alone; he had a force on which he could rely. He thought he could now take the field and openly attack the enemy.

In the reform of abuses there are two dangers to be avoided. The first is that inconsiderate and precipitate zeal which defines its principles in harsh and contemptuous language. This method, while it provokes evil-doers to greater excess, discourages the pusillanimous, and makes those already soured really venomous. Severity results in passions which were roused before becoming more violent than ever. Instead of gaining anything one loses all. When the servants found the cockle among the wheat they sought their master. "Wilt thou that we go and gather it up? And he said, No, lest perhaps gathering up the cockle you root up the wheat also together with it." (Matt. xiii, 28-9). The labourer in the field of God must be careful not to ruin the entire crop by untimely haste in destroying the cockle which the celestial husbandman is content to leave until the time of harvest.

The second danger is found in an unwise choice of means to effect the desired reforms. It is sometimes advisable for a priest to keep his hatred of vice in the background for the time being, in order to rescue the victims themselves; to regard failings with a pitying eye; to handle gently wounds that will have to be probed eventually; to pour in oil and wine without any admixture of gall and vinegar; and to use the knife cautiously, so that he may cure the evil without destroying the man. Hearts are not healed by being crushed. "I have never been angry with my people," said M. Vianney, "I do not remember ever having scolded them."

We have seen that the inhabitants of this district were possessed by a craving for amusement. Dancing more especially was the favourite pastime on Sundays and festivals. Concerning the dangers attendant on this diversion everything there is to say has already been said. St. John Chrysostom in his Homilies, St. Jerome in his Letters, St. Ambrose and St. Basil in their admirable discourses, have exhausted the subject—and so completely that

those who would speak on it are reduced to merely echoing their words. Dancing is rarely an innocent occupation ; but in a village it is particularly dangerous, by reason of the easy relations which prevail, the freedom from all grave and prudent control, and the breaking-down of the barriers imposed by respect and decorum. Young men find in it an incentive to passion ; and young women lose, along with their modesty, the taste for piety and their contentment with more simple pleasures. And it was in this craze for dancing that the Curé of Ars saw the principal obstacle to his projects of reform.

One day he found that a fiddler had arrived in the village, and that preparations were in progress for a dance. " My friend," said he, " you are plying a trade which is not pleasing to the good God." " Monsieur le Curé, a man must live." " Quite so, my friend ; but a man must also die, and I very much fear that when you come to do so, you will find it is not good to have lived by such a means. Come now, we will make a deal. How much per day do you charge ?" " Twenty francs." " Very well then, here are forty ; and now depart in peace, and leave us in peace too."

The patronal festival drew nigh and things looked critical. It had never yet passed without the accompaniments of music, dancing and uproarious mirth ; at which the entire countryside assisted and even Trévoux and Villefranche helped to swell the company. The unruly crowd, the dissipation and the noise, unsettled the parish for a long time thereafter. This was the enemy who must be promptly attacked and defeated. It was plain to see that the struggle would be fierce and victory hotly disputed ; but generous souls make efforts proportional to the results they hope to attain. Our Saint determined to make an end of a scandal that desolated his soul once and for all. The difficulty was how to set about it. He bethought himself of a passage in the Gospel where mention is made of a devil that goeth not out save by prayer and fasting. When he wished to obtain from Almighty God special graces of conversion he always had recourse to these means—abstinence from food and the passing of his days and nights in prayer. Later on we shall speak of his austerities in detail ; at present it is sufficient to say that he gave himself up to these two means, asking our Lord to cast an eye of pity on his parish and to cause the love of earthly pleasures to die in those souls for whom He had deigned to die Himself.

To these supernatural means—which cannot be too much recommended to the imitation of other pastors—he debated with himself whether it would not be wise to add another. To inveigh against an abuse and fulminate anathemas against all and sundry is an easy matter ; but invective appeals to few and converts fewer still. Nevertheless, he would speak his mind to his parishioners, reminding them that life is intended to be taken seriously ; that man was not created and placed in the world to dance . .

that time spent in forbidden pleasures is stolen from God ; that for the time thus lost and profaned an inevitable account will be exacted ; that this account is sometimes rendered even in this life ; and that it is folly to sacrifice eternity for the sake of an hour's pleasure.

" In the world, my brethren, men think only of amusement. But a man cannot offer a dance in expiation of the sins of his poor life. If you must amuse yourselves while you are here, at least do not offend the good God . . . But it is just those who have the least fear of God and His judgments in their hearts that have nothing but pleasure in their heads . . .

" One day St. Eligius was carrying the viaticum to a sick person and he passed a place where dancing was going on. One of the dancers said, ' We ought to kneel down.' Another replied by a horrible blasphemy. The Saint, hearing it, cried, ' Lord, punish them.' They all fell dead instantly . . . St. Eligius raised them to life again ; after which he said, ' Lord, let them see who are round about them.' They saw themselves encircled by devils . . .

" See, my brethren, those who enter a ball-room leave their angel-guardian at the door, and his place is taken by a devil, so that there are just as many devils in the room as there are dancers.

" This is what the Holy Spirit says by the mouth of His prophet : ' The children of this world amuse themselves to the sound of instruments of music . . . a moment after hell receives them.' A man must needs have lost his wits to go to a dance knowing that hell is recruited from dancers. Once I saw an old man in spectacles going to a dance leaning on a stick—a pitiable sight. . . . Another was going to look on, carrying one child and leading another. I thought to myself : ' He is on his way to hell and taking them with him.'

" ' Whoever will amuse himself with the devil,' said St. Peter Chrysologus, ' cannot rejoice with Jesus Christ.' One cannot get to heaven without having deserved to go there, and one does not do that by disobedience to the commands of Jesus Christ. Has He not said : ' This wicked world, this unhappy world, I pray not for it ' ? . . . See, my brethren, our Lord does not say : ' Blessed are those who laugh ! Blessed are they who dance !' On the contrary, He says : ' Blessed are those who weep ! Blessed are they who suffer ! ' "

Thus spoke the Curé of Ars ; but his prayers, his tears, and his whole expression, so full of sorrow, spoke much more eloquently than his words. But it was in the confessional that the anxiety which gnawed his soul made itself felt ; there he addressed himself gently but forcibly to the young women who were tempted to incur so much risk for a fleeting hour of enjoyment ; and to their mothers who, because they had not the strength of mind

to resist the importunities of their children, might afterwards have to lament the results of their own baneful complacency.

The words of M. Vianney might have appeared unreal and exaggerated to his hearers, had they not been able to view his life and practice at close quarters. What an immense weight his penances and mortifications, his fasts and continual prayer, lent to his exhortations. "Our Curé does all he tells us to do; he practises what he preaches; we have never known him take part in any diversion; his only pleasure is to pray to the good God; it may well be that pleasure lies that way, since he finds it there. We should follow his counsels. After all, he wishes nothing but our good." These reflections, and others like them, began to be heard at the family fireside in the evening; and, little by little, paved the way for the acceptance of the advice their good pastor urged upon them.

But now it was the eve of the great day, and there was already much excitement abroad. A deputation of young men waited upon the Maire of the village to ask his authority to hold the ball, as had been done in former years. At the mention of the word the old Maire frowned. He was an honest man, and full of esteem and veneration for his Curé; anxious to support his projects of reform, he had pledged himself to prevent the recurrence of those scenes which had caused him so much affliction. "My friends," he said to the deputation, "I have promised our holy Curé to oppose this ball; and I intend to keep my word. Do you as I do, follow his wise counsels, and you will never repent yourselves of it." The giddy young fellows to whom he addressed himself went off to Trévoux, and returned with the permission they sought over the signature of the Sous-Préfet. "M. le Sous-Préfet is my chief," said the Maire; "I cannot forbid what he has authorised; but the police of the Commune are under my orders. Mark well what I say, if there is any disorder I shall be there!"

The day arrived. The necessary preparations for the ball had been made in the square, to the great displeasure of the Curé, who groaned over the obstinacy and short-sightedness of these young people. It is true their triumph was not altogether unmixed or complete. The organisers of the entertainment had schemed to much purpose; but on one point their arrangements fell through—and that the most important. They had counted on the presence of a goodly number of young women, whereas all, or at any rate the best part of them, failed to appear; they remained in prayer in the church, under the wing of their mothers; and their absence robbed the proceedings of much of their interest. Also at nightfall the Maire, girt with his official scarf, arrived on the scene to intimate to the assemblage that they must disperse instantan—he had no need to speak twice. At the same moment the church bell rang for night-prayers. That evening the church was full, for there was a very general feeling that this much repa-

ration was due to their pastor. We regret we have been unable to find any trace of the actual discourse that M. Vianney held to his flock on this occasion. All we know is that it was very affecting and that during its delivery he was seen to be in tears.

While His battle was thus being fought outwardly, Almighty God completed the work inwardly. Disconcerted, disappointed with a triumph which had all the elements of a failure, the good sense of the young men of Ars reasserted itself and, yielding to maternal advice, they came in shoals to ask their Curé to enrol them in one or other of his confraternities; besides which they wanted to make amends for all the anxiety they had caused him.

The efforts of some of the ringleaders of the district to perpetuate the worldly and riotous character of the patronal feast of the village only resulted in turning their defeat into a rout. It became a religious festival, sanctified by the reception of the sacraments and legitimate Christian rejoicings. There were here and there insignificant manifestations of dissatisfaction, but these little scandals were engineered from elsewhere. And the young men from round about Ars made various attempts to draw away their whilom companions in disorder by taunts and sneers. "Why don't you do as others do?" they asked. "If you listen to your Curé, he will make Capuchins of you all," and so on. But they were powerless in the face of the invincible resolution of the villagers to do nothing to vex their Curé. "You may do as you like," M. Vianney had said; "but if there is the least trouble I shall remain here no longer: I go at once."

Nevertheless, there was one more attempt on the part of the forces of disorder to recover lost ground. This was headed by some of those who ought to have known better—a few fathers of families in the vicinity—and it ended as disastrously as the previous ones, for the good Curé met them with a gentle badinage, which effected its purpose without wounding its victims. After complimenting the young men on their staunchness he continued: "Last Sunday I noticed several men belonging to my parish, whose years should have suggested to them a more sedate bearing and more discreet behaviour. These individuals were wearing ribbons in their hats. I thought at first that they were offering themselves for sale." No more was needed to make the parties concerned thoroughly ashamed of themselves. People do not usually resist good for very long; they have regard to the end desired and that end was in this instance their own welfare. The Curé of Ars had given ample proof that he loved souls above everything, and now his influence had become well-nigh irresistible.

Vanquished on ground of its own choosing, carefully fortified by long-established custom and the natural craving of human nature for enjoyment, the spirit of disorder broke out in a new direction—this time under pretext of the festivities that usually attend weddings in the country. But here again, thanks to the

respect with which M. Vianney was regarded by the parents, an end was promptly made of the abuse. He next turned his attention to a matter of much greater importance—the sanctification of Sunday.

For some years past all the best-disposed people had been much occupied in their minds over this question. They had grasped the fact that the Sunday had a social aspect, which had not hitherto been sufficiently taken account of; that it was not only a question of the catechism, but also one of well-being and freedom.

Almighty God, who created the soul and body of His creature, and perfectly understands the capabilities of both, has exactly determined the time that man ought to devote to the care of each. He fixed the proportions of spiritual and temporal labour by nothing less than His own example. “And he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. And he blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it.” (Gen. ii, 2-3). Thus far the charter, fundamental and imprescriptible, which assures to Adam’s posterity a rest following on labour sanctified by prayer; the law by which human activity should be regulated; the ordinance that co-ordinates man’s powers and forms the foundation of moral and material order in the world. Thus, in all times and places six days of labour have sufficed man to gain his subsistence without diminishing his powers; to cultivate the soil without detriment to his health and happiness. The seventh day, consecrated to rest of body by the worship of God, has, in like manner, sufficed man to refresh his soul, preserve the faith that is in him, re-animate his hopes, inflame his love, and go forward in peace and cheerfulness towards the end for which he was created.

There was no point of the divine law which appealed more powerfully to the Curé of Ars, and none which he brought more frequently to the notice of his congregation than this one—the sanctification of Sunday. Thus:—“You work, and work; but you achieve ruin—ruin of soul, ruin of body. If one asked of those who work on Sunday: ‘What have you done?’ they might well reply: ‘I have sold my soul to the devil; I have made void the promises of my baptism; and crucified our Lord afresh. My steps verge towards hell, where there will be an eternity of tears to no purpose . . .’ When I see those who carry their crops on Sunday, I reflect that they also carry their soul towards hell.

“Oh! how mistaken is he who thus toils on Sunday with an idea that he is making more money or doing more work. Can two or three francs ever compensate for the injury one does to oneself in breaking the law of the good God? You imagine that everything depends on your work, but what if sickness overtake you, or an accident happen? . . . It only needs a small matter—a storm, a fall of hail, or a frost. The good God holds everything in His hand; He can requite when and how it pleases Him, and

His resources are boundless. Is not He all-powerful? Will He not remain Master to the end?

"He has commanded you to work, but He has also directed that you rest. He has commanded you to pray, but He has forbidden you to be disquieted. Listen to these two sayings of our Lord: 'Therefore I say unto you, be not solicitous for your life, what you shall eat, nor for the body, what you shall put on. Is not the life more than the meat: and the body more than the raiment?' (Matt. vi., 25). Well now, the body and the life having been given to you, how can food and clothing be withheld? 'Be not solicitous therefore, saying, What shall we eat: or what shall we drink, or wherewith shall we be clothed? . . . For your Father knoweth that you have need of all these things. Seek ye therefore the kingdom of God, and his justice, and all these things shall be added unto you. Be not therefore solicitous for tomorrow; for the morrow will be solicitous for itself. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.' (Matt. vi., 34).

"Man is not merely a beast of burden, he is also a spirit created to the image of God. He has not only material wants and gross appetites, he has also spiritual wants and appetites of the heart; he lives not only by bread, he lives by faith, prayer, love and adoration.

"'Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth unto life everlasting.' (John vi., 27). What will it profit you to have worked the Sabbath through? When you go hence you will leave the land in such condition as may be; you will take nothing with you. Ah! when one is attached to the land it is pain and grief to leave it . . . Our first object is to go to God; that is why we are here . . . My brethren, we must die on Sunday and rise again on Monday."

Again:—

"The Sunday belongs to the good God; it is His own—the Lord's day. He made all the days of the week, and could have kept them all; He has given you six, He has only reserved the seventh for Himself. What right have you to touch what does not belong to you? You know that stolen goods are of no benefit to anyone. The day that you filch from Him will profit you no more. I know two sure ways of becoming poor: To work on Sunday and to take the property of others."

This last was a favourite saying of the Curé of Ars. To the end of his life it was ever on his lips and in his catechisms—as the fruit of his long experience.

To be just, it has to be admitted that the zeal of M. Vianney found here a ready and docile response. Under his guidance Ars very soon became and always remained the exceptional parish that has been so universally admired. Never did anyone work in the fields on a Sunday, even in harvest-time; rest and prayer obtained everywhere.

This population, it is true, are entirely agricultural. But no one understands like the man of the fields the divine law of toil and rest, the necessary alliance between action and prayer. His life is passed in most intimate relations with God. He has constantly to look for and await from the hand of God something that it is not given to his labour to produce. Whate'er it be, he can only draw it down from heaven by prayer ; not so much as a drop of water for his grain nor a ray of sunshine for his vines ; he has no other means of staying the rains that threaten to drown his crops or fending off the drought that would wither them up. He feels himself absolutely dependent upon God. To cause the ground to yield of her abundance God and man are united in a mysterious bond of will, strength and co-operation. The hand of God has placed the germ of life within the seed, the hand of man sows it ; man prepares the soil, Almighty God waters it. While the creature rests for very weariness He who neither slumbers nor sleeps completes the work.

These and other considerations appeared continually in the discourses of the Curé of Ars. "Do not mistrust the Providence of the good God," said he. "Divine Providence made your crops to grow ; it will give you plenty of time to reap them." Relying on this principle, he never relaxed the severity with which he forbade Sunday-work, save on the very rarest occasions. The weather might threaten as it would, his people became accustomed to rely on his word, that there was no danger for their harvest.

One Sunday in July the harvest was in full swing and the freshly-cut corn strewed the face of the country. At the time of High Mass the wind got up and great black clouds gathered ; a storm was evidently about to break. M. le Curé ascends the pulpit, forbids the sheaves to be touched, and promises his parishioners more than enough fine weather in which to carry their crops. All happened as he had foretold ; fifteen rainless days followed.

"I happened to be at Ars during hay-making time," says the Abbé Renard. "Save for some few intervals, which had allowed the peasants to mow their meadows, there had been a wet week ; the hay could not be stacked by Saturday night, as it was not sufficiently dry. On Sunday, although the weather was lovely and the hay had lain out all the week exposed to the wet, not a haymaker was to be seen in the fields. The neighbourhood of Ars was covered with hay-cocks that had not yet been carried. I met a worthy farmer and took the liberty of testing him. 'But, my friend, your hay will be ruined ?' 'No fear of that,' replied he. 'He who gave it me is good enough and powerful enough to preserve it for me. Besides, our holy Curé will not have us work on Sunday ; we must do as he bids us.' " God, now as always, blessed this obedience. The villagers of Ars, who lived by the produce of their land, soon found themselves in easy circumstances. It was only those who infringed the law of the Sabbath by working

in secret on that day that were ruined. "For," said a good man, "in this place human respect is turned the other way."

In after years, when sundry petty industries had arisen in the village to meet the wants of strangers and the exigencies of the pilgrimage had multiplied inns, workshops and stores, the same influence continued to make itself felt; the Sabbath rest never failed to be scrupulously observed. On that day the tools of the artisan and the implements of the farmer lay untouched, shops were closed, every industry stood still. The Curé would have had even the omnibus-service suspended; the circulation of strangers and the coming and going of carriages distressed him; and several times he expressed his dissatisfaction thereat. The pilgrims respected his wishes and conformed to them by avoiding arriving and, much more, departing on Sunday except for the gravest reasons. On their part, the omnibus managers changed their itinerary; and instead of stopping in the square they halted at the hotel at the entrance of the village.

We recollect that in 1856, on the Sunday within the octave of Corpus Christi, an omnibus had come as far as the front of the church, through the open doors of which could be seen the Blessed Sacrament exposed on the altar. The horses, which were in full-trot, brought up short, and notwithstanding the driver's vigorous application of the whip, stood firm as Balaam's ass under the staff of her master. There was no help for it; the equipage had to turn round and take the road back to the hotel. This circumstance, which made some stir at the time, was immediately brought to our notice by credible witnesses; they had seen it, and they are still living.*

To the question of observance of Sunday is allied that of the cabaret, which last is the plague of our country districts and the despair of many a poor curé. Wherever a cabaret is installed the church finds a competitor. As the cabaret fills so the church empties. Thanks to the cabaret, Sunday no longer seems to exist for the men—only for the women. What an amount of harm has it to answer for! The atmosphere our villagers inhale within its portal is deadly; every good instinct is withered and every bad character seems to be encouraged and incited to surpass his previous records. The greater part of the dramas which are enacted at the assizes and the office of the correctional police have had their prologue at the cabaret.

When he arrived at Ars M. Vianney found two of these delectable establishments in full work in the parish. He made it his business to suppress them forthwith, and set about it with all his zeal and not less than his habitual prudence. Without offending the parties concerned, indulging in recriminations, or making too direct attacks on them, he let slip no occasion, either in the pulpit

* This was written in 1862.

or private conversation, of expressing his opinion concerning cabarets. Gradually and slowly the village came round to his way of thinking. One of the cabarets put up its shutters at once ; the other delayed somewhat, trying to hold out against the zeal of the holy priest ; but little by little its popularity declined, its customers dropped off ; then it was severely left alone, after which it went the same way as the first.

When the pilgrimage set in, in place of these centres of disorder, the Curé allowed the establishment of modest hostelrys for the accommodation of visitors. These houses were well-conducted, and closed on Sundays and festivals during the hours of divine service ; they were only open for the entertainment of pilgrims, and the villagers never forgathered there.

Ars thus assumed a grave and religious aspect—very different from that of other places—which carried the mind back to days of the remote past. During the day the church was the focus of activity ; evenings were spent at home ; at night peace and quiet reigned ; for the repose of the inhabitants was never disturbed by the brawls and singing so common elsewhere, and which reflect as little credit on the local police administration as they do on the musical talent of the neighbourhood. In this we have an illustration of the fact that to effect a reformation in popular manners and customs it is idle to rely on the arm of the law alone, for it cannot compel that goodwill without which the best-intentioned regulations must always fail. And so at Ars the influence that moved and changed the hearts of the people was not that of the law ; but of this loved and venerated priest, who spoke in the name and spirit of Jesus Christ.

Had the Curé of Ars remained content with having removed the scandal of servile work on Sunday, dances, and cabarets, he would have done much towards the moral and religious regeneration of his parish ; but he would not necessarily have constituted Sunday as the Lord's day nor encompassed the glory that a well-spent Sunday gives to God, or the peace that He gives to men of goodwill. To take away from people all that beguiles and distracts them without putting anything in its place is but to condemn them to idleness and tedium. In order that Sunday may be the real Sunday of the good God, bodily toil which depresses the soul must be replaced by spiritual exercises which elevate and draw it nearer to its Creator.

It was a pleasure to find oneself in this privileged parish on a Sunday or festival, the Abbé Renard tells us in his notes. Communions were many and prayer was continual—the number in the church never seemed to grow less. The attendance at the services, which followed one another at short intervals, was so considerable that the air was stifling. The Curé held a catechism regularly, an hour after noon, which was almost as crowded as the Mass. To Vespers succeeded Compline, which having con-

cluded, M. le Curé led the recitation of the rosary, in which everyone took part.

At the close of the day the bell called the faithful to church for the third time, and once again the whole parish responded to the summons. M. Vianney emerged from the confessional, went into the pulpit, read the night prayers, and then gave one of those touching homilies, of which we shall have more to say presently, in words at once simple and elevated, powerful yet pathetic. Under the continued influence of his instruction sinners were moved to repentance, the just encouraged to persevere, proud souls became more modest, those in affliction felt more resigned, and those in trouble more calm, while the bonds which attach man to God and his fellow-men were strengthened, so that on the Lord's day the parish of Ars presented the consoling spectacle so admirably described by one of our most celebrated orators :—

“The public streets were filled with a multitude, dressed in their best. People of every age were there, with their hopes and their fears both moderated by higher considerations than those of this world. The spirit of fraternity animates those who meet ; the servant seems drawn towards his master ; the gulf between the poor man and the rich is narrowed ; all, by the common bond of the same duties accomplished, and the consciousness of the same grace received, feel themselves more clearly to be the sons of the same Father who is in heaven. The hush of servile works, accompanied by the joyful and measured voice of the church bells in telling men that they are free, also warns them to prepare themselves to support, for God's sake, the days when they will not be so. Nothing austere clouds the faces ; the idea of religious observance is moderated by that of repose ; and this, in turn, is ennobled by the idea of a religious festival.” (*Conférences de Notre-Dame, Lacordaire*).

It is difficult now that a second growth has overlaid this first primitive vegetation to recognise the traces of the far-reaching work effected by the hands of our able workman. The influx of pilgrims, together with the horde of strangers of all sorts who have descended upon Ars to exploit them, has entirely changed the face of the district—we have heard these same strangers described as the mosses and lichens of the pilgrimage : an ingenious comparison—but twenty-five or thirty years ago it was a veritable Christian oasis.

“I have very often walked in the fields during harvest-time,” said a constant visitor to us, “without hearing a single blasphemy or an unbecoming expression. One day, when I had complimented one of the villagers on the fact, he replied with great simplicity, ‘We are no better than other folk ; but we should be ashamed to behave in such a way so near to a saint.’

“At the sound of the bell at noon I saw with admiration the men uncover their heads and recite the *Angelus*. Not a drunken

man, none of those scenes of violence or scandalous revelry which are the usual sequence of drink. Sacraments are very much frequented ; every Saturday, as far as confessions are concerned, resembles the eve of a festival. In what other parish can one see people come to the church to pray at two or three o'clock in the morning—not the women only, but the men as well ? And they come again in the evening, after their hard day's work !”

It has to be admitted that there were some hardened sinners, who resisted all the efforts of their pastor's zeal. Evil penetrates everywhere, and when it is found side by side with excellence seems to gather from the proximity a still higher degree of perversity. But for one who knows the Dombes, or what the state of affairs at Ars was before the coming of M. Vianney, and what that of the surrounding parishes still is, the good that this holy priest of Jesus Christ accomplished among his people must ever remain his greatest miracle.

CHAPTER XIV

HOW M. VIANNEY PROVIDED FOR THE SOLEMNITY OF PUBLIC WORSHIP AND DECORATED HIS CHURCH

After this Joas had a mind to repair the house of the Lord. (II. Par. xxiv., 4.)

He would have the altar beautiful, the walls and the sanctuary spotless, the sacristy well-arranged, the sacred vessels rich and shining : all these were the objects of his solicitude. (St. Jerome.)

EXILED far from the heavenly Jerusalem which is to be his destination at the end of his life-long journey, man has need of a resting place from week to week, in which to recuperate his bodily and spiritual faculties, so that he may face the labours and trials of his pilgrimage with renewed vigour.

But, in order that this temporary relief may be effective, it should have an air of festivity, for human nature has need of such. Holy Church—well aware of this fact—has provided for it. She alone has the faculty of affording her children those pleasures which are worthy of their object—the strengthening and refreshing of their souls ; and those joys which, while they satisfy the senses, also appeal to the soul. For this it is only necessary for the faithful to assemble with a right intention. The church is open to all ; lights shine above an altar prepared and decorated ; clouds of incense perfume the sanctuary ; the music echoes through the arches as it does in the hearts of the worshippers. All the riches, all the splendour reserved for the prince in his palace are here presented to the gaze of the Christian. They beautify, relieve and glorify the monotones of his daily existence, and teach him that in God's church and only there the humble, the poor and the peasant are regarded as the well-beloved children of the Most High.

The Curé of Ars well understood this poetic aspect of the Sunday ; he had breathed it in his childhood ; he had experienced it when he was a simple vicaire. He recognised that for the people their church is everything : their life, their faith, their hope, their baptism, their family, their glory, their eternity ; that the statues and pictures are just so many open books, wherein the simple and unlettered may read what the learned ones of this earth so often fail to grasp—the story of human existence ; whence man came, what man is, whither man is going. When he came to Ars M. Vianney found his poor little church for the most part cheerless and uninviting ; everything in it was in the most rudimentary stage. And he grieved over this desolation of the house of God. For his own part, he was quite content to possess nothing,

and gloried in his poverty ; but for his Master he would provide all possible pomp and circumstance. In all that concerned divine worship he had a veritable passion for the beautiful : “ Oh ! how I love,” he would say, at some fresh acquisition, “ to augment the *ménage* of the good God ! How can one refrain from giving all that is rich and rare to our Lord ? What ingratitude to show ourselves mean and niggardly towards a God who has shown Himself so prodigal towards us ! Did He not pour out the last drop of His Blood for us on the Cross ? Does He not even now bestow Himself wholly and entirely upon us in the Holy Eucharist ? ”

From the very beginning M. Vianney had formed a complete plan for the restoration of his church ; and he commenced with the high altar. The existing one was of more than primitive simplicity ; besides which it was falling to pieces from sheer old age. He provided a new altar at his own cost, for he would have been ashamed to have recourse to the liberality of others before he had exhausted his own resources. It was a source of delight to him to help the workmen in the erection of his fine new altar. This first piece of restoration necessitated a further one. The dilapidated state of the choir-stalls contrasted unfavourably with the gilding and brilliant colouring of the new altar. So the reverend carpenter became a decorator, and for several months was to be seen, paint-brush in hand, endeavouring to impart to the old mouldings and ancient panels something of their pristine freshness. No doubt these efforts left a good deal to be desired from an artistic point of view ; but in the eyes of the simple villagers of Ars they appeared to be the most finished productions of the painter’s craft, while the choristers took possession of their rejuvenated stalls with a satisfaction that could not have been more complete had they come from the hands of Giotto or Fra Angelico themselves.

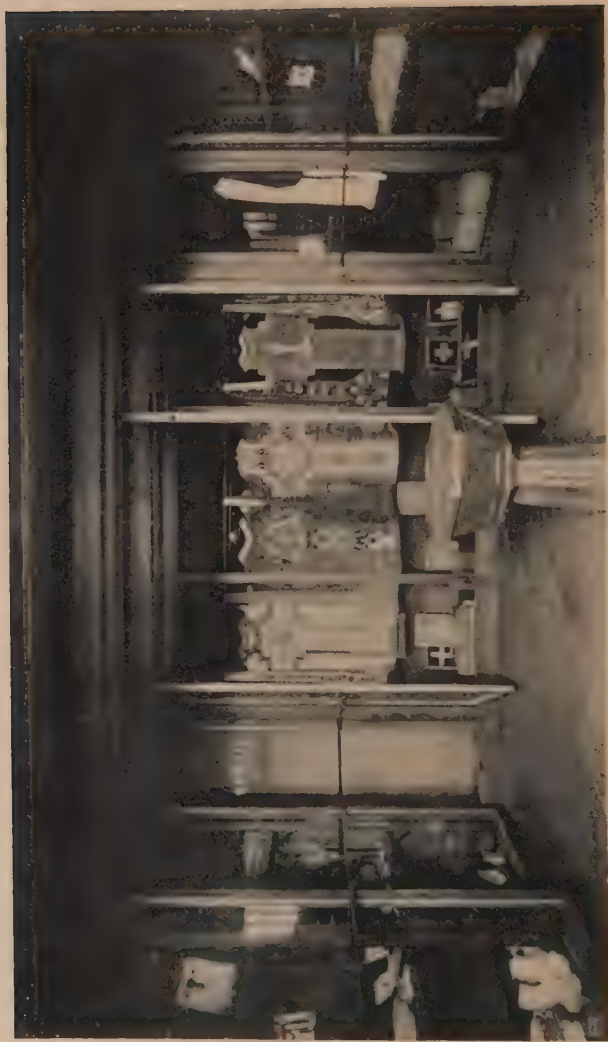
These works gave scope to the natural activity of the Curé of Ars, and saved him from the stagnation he had so much dreaded since he had come to live in the Dombes. “ The enervating atmosphere of this country affects me,” he said, with a sigh ; “ I fear I shall lose my soul from insufficient work.” At the spectacle of the zeal of the pastor his congregation began to understand that everything is great where the service of God is in question ; and they repaid his love for the house of God in their midst by an ever-increasing assiduity in their visits to it. On days of greater solemnity the church began to assume an imposing appearance.

Of the entire circle of the Christian festivals that of Corpus Christi takes the first place. It still remains popular in France, despite the growing enfeeblement of faith ; and it ever remained prominent in the devotion of the Curé of Ars. From the year after his installation he endeavoured to celebrate it with all possible solemnity, and went to considerable expense in the equipment of a troop of “ little white angels,” as he called them. He

remembered how our Lord had always shown His love for children ; and it seemed to him that in presenting the little ones of his parish to the good Master, by causing them to line His passage on the day of His triumph, he was rendering Him a homage after His own divine Heart. He delighted to provide them with their white dresses—these children who had an air of innocence and goodness that drew all hearts to them. “ Now, my children,” he would say to them, “ we must be very good, very recollected and very modest. We must imagine that we are in the actual presence of God, and taking the place of the angels. Say to Him, from the bottom of your hearts : ‘ My God, I love you above all things !’ If you would be pleasing to our Lord, your souls must be as white as the dresses you are going to wear.” Animated by these words, the little company assisted at the procession with a gracefulness of which their mothers were proud and the parish edified. This was the beginning of those beautiful feasts of Corpus Christi, which were and still remain one of the features of the pilgrimage to Ars. And now an unexpected development took place, which added yet more to the dignity of the celebrations.

When he learned all that his good Curé had in view to revive the status of public worship in his little church the Vicomte d’Ars would by no means consent to be left behind in zeal ; for he also held very dearly the external glory of the house of God. He sent to Paris for ornaments wherewith to embellish the new high altar—six candlesticks, two large reliquaries, and a tabernacle in brass, gilded over and of excellent workmanship. This tabernacle had been originally intended for the principal altar of the church of St. Sulpice, in Paris. Then came a splendid canopy, which could not be got through the low and narrow doorway of the church. The churchwardens were in despair, and M. le Curé found them at their wits’ end. He had long desired to deal with the façade of his church, and let the Vicomte know without more ado that the only way out of the difficulty was to replace the existing entry by a larger and handsomer one. It is thus that the first enlargement of the church and of the actual doorway came about. The effect was rather mediocre and the taste somewhat dubious, but at the moment it was the best that could be done. Followed some richly-worked banners, several superb chasubles, and finally a large monstrance in silver-gilt. There is a certain delicacy of expression which can always enhance the value of a gift, which was not lacking on the present occasion, for his gift was accompanied by a charming letter, wherein the generous Vicomte expressed his respectful affection for his Curé and commended himself to his prayers.

The holy man was almost beside himself at the sight of all this magnificence. He was seen to be alternately laughing and weeping, or with joined hands invoking the benedictions of heaven on the benefactor of his church. And, not content with this, he



Vestments presented by the Vicomte d'Ars.

Vestments presented by the Vicomte d'Ars.

collected the villagers, young and old, in order that they might enjoy the sight of his newly-acquired treasures.

"You have missed something," wrote a correspondent from the château, "in not being here when the cases containing the latest tokens of the Vicomte's generosity were opened. You would have enjoyed the lively—one might almost venture to say, infantine—satisfaction of the holy Curé. You can form no idea of his transports at each new discovery. They were unpacked in the square, and he fetched his good old people to see, saying to one of them: 'Come, good Mother, come and see something beautiful before you die!'"

For some days he was at a loss as to how to show his gratitude to God. Then an idea came to him, and on the following Sunday he said, in church, "My brethren, you have seen all that M. d'Ars has just done for us. Well then, I propose to lead you all in procession to Fourvières, to give thanks to our Lady, and offer all these fine things to her. She it is who will bless them for us. We will consecrate ourselves to her at the same time, in the sanctuary where she shows herself so powerful and so beneficent. Then she will have to convert us every one."

(NOTE.—Notre Dame de Fourvières is a very ancient shrine of our Lady, the original church dating as far back as the days of St. Pothinus, Bishop of Lyons, in the early days of Christianity.—Translator).

This proposal was very much to the taste of everybody, and all waited impatiently for the appointed day. It could not have been better chosen: the feast of St. Sixtus, patron of the parish. So before dawn on a beautiful day in August the parishioners, arrayed in their best, filled the church. Their pastor was there before them; he had much to ask of Almighty God: a host of joys, presentiments, and hopes flooded his soul. He was surrounded by his entire flock. "It would have been an easy matter to attack the parish," remarks Catherine, "for there was nobody left to defend it if they had."

At Trévoux they still remember the impression produced by the arrival of this rustic procession. But what struck everyone much more than the rich banners and other incidentals of the procession was the Curé of Ars himself, with pale and mortified features and an air of sanctity pervading his whole person. After a brief halt at the bank of the river they left in two large barges drawn by horses, arriving in Lyons in time for M. Vianney to say Mass, at which the greater number of his parishioners received Holy Communion.

This edifying journey remains inscribed as a memorable event in the history of Ars. Not only did it inaugurate the sumptuous gifts made to the church, but it drew down from heaven fresh graces on this little corner of earth, which were later to attract a vast concourse of pilgrims from all parts of the world to this

new chapel-of-ease to Fourvières. It marked precisely the commencement of a great religious transformation. Then it was that a sudden light illuminated the soul of the holy priest ; a presentiment of the future glory of his humble village, in which he saw in spirit multitudes flocking thither in quest of health of body and the much more precious health of soul ; and he seemed to hear an echo of the refrain of Isaias : " Give praise, O thou barren, that bearest not : sing forth praise and make a joyful noise, thou that did not travail with child . . . Enlarge the place of thy tent, and stretch out the skins of thy tabernacles, spare not : lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes." (Isa. liv., 1-2.)

" I have prophesied once in my life, . . . " said M. Vianney, towards the end of his career. Then, interrupting himself, as if he feared to be taken seriously, he continued, in a jocular strain : " O false prophet ! prophet of Baal ! . . . I predicted that a day would come when Ars would no longer be able to contain its inhabitants."

CHAPTER XV

M. VIANNEY FURTHER ENLARGES HIS CHURCH BY THE ERECTION OF CHAPELS

Build me here seven altars . . . (Numb. xxiii, 1.)

. . . Here, may the faithful perform their vows ; the guilty lay down the burden of their sins ; holy faith be strengthened ; piety be satisfied ; and iniquity, having been corrected, depart. (Lyons Missal : Preface of Dedication of church.)

“THE SOUL,” says St. Thomas, “is the form of the body, and imprints thereon its beauty.” Little by little, by transformation under the hand and inspirations of his faith the little church of Ars became to its Curé what the body is to the soul—an image and a reflection. This applies especially to the five chapels by which the building was successively extended and which are all the creations of M. Vianney. His object in opening these chapels was not merely to increase the accommodation of the church, but to provide a series of compartments, each one of which should recall some mystery of faith or the particular memory of some saint ; the whole promoting in the happiest manner the symbolic character of a sacred edifice. In a church, as in life outside it, it is good to encounter here and there stations or reminders of sorrow, consolation or hope, all the while advancing towards the sanctuary which is the image of heaven.

The first chapel the Curé of Ars built was on the north side of the church, opposite the Lady chapel ; and he dedicated it to his patron, John the Baptist. There is a traditional belief in the neighbourhood that its erection was connected with a marvellous event which took place during the first years of M. Vianney’s ministry. One day (so the tradition has it) during Mass he saw the holy Precursor standing at the gospel side of the altar, who gave him to understand that he wished to be specially honoured in the church at Ars, and that by his intercession many sinners would return to the good God.

We relate this tradition under all reserve. We know it was the opinion prevailing at the time, founded on some few words that M. Vianney allowed to escape him, but further than that we do not guarantee its authenticity.

Whatever may be the truth concerning this apparition, there was another circumstance, not less marvellous, which accompanied the construction of this chapel of St. John the Baptist. When it was completed the charitable priest, who gave everything to the poor without keeping anything for himself, found that he had no money. To admit his impecuniosity and ask a little delay would

have been easy but it would only have postponed the evil day. Face to face with a grave difficulty, his usual resource was to take a walk in the country, rosary in hand ; prayer and the fresh air relieved him a little. On the present occasion he had hardly passed the last house in the village and was following the borders of the fields when he saw a horseman approaching, who, reining in his steed and saluting him respectfully, inquired sympathetically after his health. " I am tolerably well," replied the man of God, " but I am in considerable trouble just now." " Eh, what ! Is it then your parishioners who cause you anxiety ?" " No, Monsieur ; on the contrary, they treat me better than I deserve. It is quite another matter that troubles me. The fact is that I have just built a chapel and have not the necessary funds to pay my workmen." The unknown appeared to reflect ; then, as M. Vianney discreetly made as if to take his leave, fearing that his last words might be interpreted as an indirect appeal for assistance, he stopped him and drew out twenty-five gold pieces. " There, Monsieur le Curé, this will pay your workmen. I commend myself to your prayers." And urging his horse to full gallop, he disappeared without leaving M. Vianney time to thank him or even ask who he was. This was the first mysterious money that the Curé of Ars received ; but it was not the last occasion on which unexpected help arrived to extricate him from a similar impasse.

A former fellow-student and rival in piety at Écully, the venerable Abbé Loras, afterwards Bishop of Dubuques, and at that time Superior of the Seminary of Meximieux, came to inaugurate and bless the new chapel, at which ceremony the congregation was enormous. It was the first time the people of Ars had seen such a multitude assemble in their church. " One would have said," as Catherine naïvely remarked, " that the holy Precursor himself had visited all the surrounding villages to call their populations to Ars. M. Loras preached on penance. Hearing the sermon and seeing the crowds, one could easily have imagined oneself transported to the banks of the Jordan. A few days after, M. le Curé said to his parishioners : ' If you only knew what has happened in that chapel you would not dare to set foot there . . . If it please the good God, He will make it known to you ; as for me, I will say no more about the matter.' "

What was it that had happened in that chapel ? What had the holy Curé seen there to cause him to exclaim with Jacob at Bethel : " How terrible is this place !" (Gen. xxviii., 17), and repeat the words of the Lord God to Moses in the vision at Horeb : " Come not nigh hither, put off the shoes from thy feet !" (Ex. iii., 5). It was one of those half-revelations of which, when they escaped him by inadvertence, his humility caused him to hasten to cover up the *imprudence*, as he called it, and to minimise the effect on public opinion. . . This much is certain, that the chapel

of St. John was ever dear and venerable in his eyes ; that in the church at Ars, within the walls of which so many miracles were worked, that chapel was as the central point which radiated light and grace around it, an august rendezvous where justice and peace have so often embraced. There it was that so many wonders of reparation and mercy were accomplished ; there the holy priest received sinners during that long period which may be called the triumphal time of the pilgrimage ; there that the last and most fruitful years of his life were passed in the obscure work of the confessional ; and there it was that he consummated a living and glorious martyrdom.

Having thus discharged his duty to his patron, M. Vianney next felt constrained to raise an altar in honour of a saint whose cult, only recently introduced into France, was daily making fresh progress.

(M. Monnin here gives an account of the discovery, on 25th May, 1802, of certain human remains in the Catacomb of Priscilla at Rome, which, from the inscription on the earthenware plates in front of the grave, were assumed to be those of St. Philomena, Virgin and Martyr. On 8th June, 1805, these relics were transferred to the church of Mugnano, in the Diocese of Nola, near Naples, where, in consequence of wonderful favours received in answer to prayer before them, the devotion spread rapidly.

But "a recent discovery by Signor Marucchi," says Père Delehaye, S. J., "*Osservazioni archeologiche sulla iscrizione di S. Filomena, Rome, 1904*, forces one to conclude that the famous epithet *Pax tecum Filumena* was not that of the deceased woman—or perhaps man—found in the tomb at the time of translation." Also that, as Mgr. Kirsch remarks : "Marucchi seems justified in concluding that the inscription and plates originally belonged to an earlier grave, and were later employed—now in the wrong order—to close another." Cf. *Legends of the Saints*, translated from the French of Père H. Delehaye, S. J., by Mrs. V. M. Crawford, p. 86. Also Art. in *Catholic Encyclopædia*, by Mgr. J. P. Kirsch, Vol. xii., p. 25.

But, as much will be found hereafter in these pages concerning St. Philomena and her patronage of the Curé of Ars, the question may be raised : *What if she was not a historical person at all ?* First, it has to be remembered that the final answer to all prayers rests with Almighty God, by whose power alone conversions, cures, etc., can be effected. Secondly, it is inconceivable that God should allow devotion such as that of M. Vianney to pass without reward. And He may well have recompensed His servant by permitting some martyred virgin of the early days of Christianity—one whose history substantially corresponded with that of St. Philomena—to aid the Curé in his work for souls, appear to and console him. In any case, it seems to be beyond question that the Saint who was the object of his devotion did

intervene actively on his behalf. As to the wonderful favours received in answer to prayer before the reputed relics at Mugnano, it has only to be remarked that the efficacy of prayer for the intercession of the saints is in no way dependent on the presence of their relics, otherwise it would evidently be useless to ask the intercession of a saint of whom no relic exists. Translator).

But what has contributed (continues M. Monnin) more than anything else to popularise the name and memory of St. Philomena on this side of the mountains, is unquestionably the devotion that the Curé of Ars felt towards her, and the ardent, almost chivalrous, love with which she was regarded by him. One can say that the fame of both has advanced simultaneously, or rather that it is beneath the glory of St. Philomena that M. Vianney always desired to hide his own—that is, that by the sensation caused by the miracles wrought at the intercession of the martyr he endeavoured to stifle the sensation caused by his own sanctity. The most perfect accord never ceased to reign between St. Philomena and her illustrious client; she granted everything to his prayers; he refused nothing to her love. It was to the credit of his *dear little saint* that he never failed to ascribe all the favours and prodigies which contributed to the celebrity of the pilgrimage to Ars.

We will not describe the chapel of St. Philomena, nor that of the *Ecce Homo* opposite to it, nor yet that of the Holy Angels, which was the first in order of subject, but the latest in order of construction. Art certainly had no voice in these naïve creations, which were in the most simple and popular style. Their architect was unable in their construction to give expression to a feeling that was foreign, not only to himself but to many others at the time the work was executed. The people love the devotion which finds entry by the senses, and are particularly accessible to this preaching of wood and stone. The inaugurator of these chapels desired before everything that they should speak the language of the picture, which is understood by the ignorant and the child alike; that heaven should there be present to their gaze; that the angels and saints should there live in their representations, to preach to and console the worshippers.

One would be tempted to think that M. Vianney, seeing into the future, wished to mark out in advance for the pilgrims who would one day come to pray in his church the various stages of their journey; some as far as a state of grace, others to the complete assuagement of their sufferings of mind and body. There is in the disposition of these chapels a prophetic symbol, so to speak, of the divine operations of which each one of them was to be the scene.

The first of these chapels was dedicated to St. Michael and the Good Angels. The mission of these blessed spirits seemed to be

to receive the souls at the entrance of the church and conduct them whither the grace of God awaited them. Of the miracles of healing that were to be effected at Ars, St. Philomena would be the instrument ; it was thus that she had already manifested her power in the kingdom of Naples and elsewhere ; by that way she had entered into possession of her posthumous glory. And, in practice, her chapel was for thirty years a new pool of Probatica ; and the finest decorations of her modest sanctuary are found in the enormous quantity of crutches which line the walls—silent witnesses to faith and gratitude.

Ars ought to have an attraction for sinners. There are few places on the earth's surface where more sudden, striking and durable conversions have come about. The three chapels of the Blessed Virgin, St. John the Baptist and the *Ecce Homo* have seen the principal acts of the divine drama by which the soul is reconciled to God. Sinners came first to the Lady chapel to find courage to descend to the depths of their own conscience and the still more difficult matter of penetrating its innermost recesses ; this was the first station. Thence they passed to the chapel of St. John, where the Precursor continued to call them to penance ; there they found the confessional of the Curé of Ars and, kneeling at the feet of the new John the Baptist, were baptised in a river of tears.

The chapel of the *Ecce Homo* next received them. Surrounded by all the symbols which could awaken within them the remembrance of the Passion, they there accomplished that pilgrimage to Calvary which the masters of spiritual life have recommended to all penitents. The life-size statue of our Saviour, scourged, covered with wounds and crowned with thorns, confronted them at the entrance and rivetted the gaze of the most indifferent ; until a group in stone of our Lady of Sorrows supporting her divine Son upon her knees, which the Italians call by the expressive name of *Pietà*, said to them in plainest language : " This is what sin has done."

Ordinarily, conversions commenced in the Lady chapel, continued in that of St. John and were completed at the feet of Him who " hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows . . . was wounded for our iniquities, bruised for our sins . . . and by his bruises we are healed." (Is. liii., 4-5.) It is quite impossible to tell what scenes have been enacted there between Christ and human souls, what heroic sacrifices have been accomplished, how many sinful attachments broken and virtuous resolutions formed.

The chapel of the *Ecce Homo* is particularly well-known and dear to those who, already tried by the mysterious chastisements of divine Providence in the past, feel that still greater trials await them in the future. " Here," said a pilgrim to us, " I find myself beneath the shadow of the Cross on Calvary by the side of our Lord ;

and so far removed from the world that I am conscious neither of its sights nor sounds ; indeed, I scarce remember that there is a world outside." He added : " Calvary is such a wholesome retreat for us, that we ought to be quite content when the Master leads us there in His train. Thither has he conducted all His friends, the predestined, His holy Mother, His apostles, the martyrs, confessors and holy virgins . . . all have gone there ; all have found themselves the better for going. The ascent is hard, but the summit is glorious. We should try to attain to it ; and, when there, endeavour to say, with generous submission to the will of Him who would have us near to Himself : ' Master, it is good for us to be here ! ' "

In such sort were the inspirations which came from those holy images to those who duly disposed themselves to understand their mute appeal.

It has seemed good to God that, by a free gift of His mercy and for the spiritual advancement of Christians, a divine power of attraction shall attach to certain objects and places. No force constrains, no human affection draws, no sensible beauty allures the multitude. And nevertheless, an indefinable charm, a mystic air of sanctity, which everyone feels but none can explain, causes them to come there and remain. And later, when the time comes to leave, something within them seems to break and bleed, in the same manner as bleeds the heart when one of its dearest and most secret fibres is torn away. Many a time have the pilgrims to Ars avowed such a feeling. What then is this attraction for the outward objects that are seen and the inward ideas they awaken ? Why is it that this attraction engrosses the soul little by little, so that it ends by becoming part of the soul herself, and incapable of detachment without laceration and pain ? It is the awakened or re-awakened consciousness of better things to come, things of the future contemplated as if already come to pass ; it is the Communion of Saints, the Christian brotherhood, the universal fatherland ; it is the clearer view of those things which the human heart would fain understand ; the possession of a beautiful beyond, of which the images and pictures before us arouse the desire ; the anticipation of a happiness beside which the most vivid dream is but a feeble and cold impression ; it is that which caused St. Peter to cry amid the glories of Thabor : " It is good for us to be here ! " and David to exclaim : " My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord, My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God." (Ps. lxxxiii., 1-2) . . . " When shall I come and appear before the face of God ? " (Ps. xli., 2). It is the conviction of future eternity, the longing for things divine, the idea of the infinite summoning to itself and guiding the hearts of men to those places of predestination which are as the antechamber of heaven.

CHAPTER XVI

M. VIANNEY'S LOVE FOR SOULS. HIS NOMINATION TO THE PARISH OF SALLES IS CANCELLED AT THE UNANIMOUS REQUEST OF HIS PARISHIONERS. HIS APOSTOLIC LABOURS AT ARS AND ELSEWHERE

But I most gladly will spend and be spent myself for your souls. (II. Cor. xii., 15.)

But what then ? So that by all means . . . Christ be preached : in this also I rejoice . . . For I know that this shall fall out to me unto salvation . . . as always, so also shall Christ be magnified in my body . . . for to me, to live is Christ. (Philip. i., 18-19-20-21.)

HAVING traced the principal events in the life of M. Vianney during the first years of his ministry at Ars, it remains to recount some of the episodes which varied the saintly uniformity of his daily labours.

The heart of the good Curé was centred on his parishioners ; he loved them as a mother loves her children ; and not only that but he knew how to make himself beloved. From the outset, the one thing the people of Ars dreaded more than anything else was to grieve their pastor. With many of them this dread was more powerful than the voice of conscience itself ; and contributed not a little to remove sundry disorders and scandals from the midst of this privileged flock.

Nevertheless, the zeal of M. Vianney found itself somewhat straitened in this parish of a few hundred souls ; and all his pastoral cares failed to satisfy the sacred fire which burned in his apostolic heart. To understand the value of a soul purchased by the Blood of Jesus Christ, to be able to open the source of this Precious Blood ; and yet to see souls in the grasp of Satan ; this is the greatest trial of a priest. His superiors, divining his feelings, offered him a more important post in one of the fairest districts of Beaujolais ; a delightful situation, air of the purest, a frank and tractable population. After a five years' sojourn under the gloomy skies of the Dombes, Salles would be a paradise ; besides which the change offered other inducements to a man for whom personal well-being and material comfort were matters of indifference.

But it was not to be. In vain did M. Vianney go twice to visit his new parish. In vain had he written to his brother—the letter lies now before us and fixes the date at 8th April, 1820.*

* There seems to be some confusion of dates here which we cannot explain. It has been stated that M. Vianney arrived at Ars 9th February, 1818 ; and M. Monnin states that the proposed change was after he had been there five years.—Translator.

" My dear Brother, I am leaving Bresse for Beaujolais ; my departure is arranged for next week. They are sending me to a parish not far from Villefranche. I hope to go to see you soon." In vain had the poor furniture of the presbytery been twice moved to the Bresse bank of the Saône : each attempt at crossing the river had been frustrated by one of those floods which used to interrupt communication between the banks before the building of the suspension-bridge.

The villagers of Ars, enchanted by these *contretemps*, desired nothing better than to have an excuse for recapturing their Curé, the idea of whose departure was unendurable. Mademoiselle d'Ars in particular was a prey to a virtuous indignation ; and, in a letter to an intimate friend she humorously spoke of no less violent a measure than that of *strangling the Vicar-General*. Happily for the safety of M. Courbon divine Providence had other means of arriving at its end. The parish took advantage of the present impossibility of his departure to entreat M. Vianney afresh. They represented to him that heaven itself had declared against the separation of pastor and people ; since, at the very moment it was about to be accomplished, it had raised an insurmountable obstacle. They spoke of the good that had been done already, of the good that still remained to be done . . . He ought not to dream of leaving his parishioners just as he had gained all their hearts and could thus more easily establish the kingdom of Jesus Christ among them.

M. Vianney replied that he had no will of his own in the matter, and all he desired was that the will of God might be done in his regard. Thereupon, a deputation was sent to the cathedral to explain the state of the case : the Curé of Ars consented to remain there, his parishioners were all eagerness to retain him ; consequently, they begged the Administration of the Archdiocese to cancel the proposed change.

Had there been any presentiment in the minds of the authorities at Lyons that, in the impending division of the archdiocese, Ars and its Curé might be included in the area of the new see, it is more than likely that the request of the deputation would have met with a refusal, and the privileged village, which will ever remain connected with the memory of its Saint, would have been relegated to its original obscurity.

The church of Salles is of great antiquity. In the tenth century, the overlords of Beaujeu gave the religious of Cluny very large properties in Beaujolais and the Dombes. In their desire to offer to God the best they had, they selected Salles, which thus became the heritage of the Lord. Some centuries later, this famous priory, the abbot of which had jurisdiction over other monasteries and various benefices in his gift—notably that of the collegiate church of Villefranche—passed with its dependencies to the Benedictines (nuns), recruited from the best families of

the district, under the name of *chanoinesses-comtesses*. There were forty-eight of them, according to the records of the visitation of 1301.

Had the Curé of Ars accepted the benefice, Salles would have become doubly historic : for the archdiocese of Lyons, which glories in the possession of his birthplace, would also have retained his tomb. God willed it otherwise ; it entered into the designs of His eternal wisdom that the diocese of Belley should be the guardian of this treasure, for which it is ever grateful.

Thenceforth, M. Vianney identified himself more than ever with his parishioners ; all his thoughts were concentrated on them ; their peace became his peace ; their joys his own ; their misfortunes his sorrows ; their virtues his reward. He attached himself to their souls as does the serf to the soil he cultivates. His horizon in life was bounded by the limits of this little Christian corner of earth, where all the providential preparations of his life had had their beginning. His activities had but one object : the glory of God through the salvation of the souls which our Lord had confided to him.

The salvation of souls being the divine work in which God shows forth His highest attributes in all their magnificence ; it is in it that man, created in the image of his Creator and working to establish the perfection of this image in himself and others, becomes pre-eminently the collaborator of Jesus Christ—another Jesus Christ in fact. What are the fatigues, the combats, the victories of earthly renown compared to his ? For, it is not a question of giving his life once, much less of exposure to risk for a time in a war that will have an end ; the priest wages war with an undying foe who can only be driven back by a miracle, and finally defeated by nothing less than the power of God. To enter upon this campaign, the priest must despoil himself of everything ; he must learn to die every hour of the day—and to the last hour of his last day. The priesthood contains in itself the idea of sacrifice, and the first victim the priest immolates should be himself. It is on this condition only that his ministry will be fruitful. And if God imposes upon him—as in the case of our Saint—the trial of a long life, he will grow old in this endurance of a living death ; he will lose his vigour of body and the first fervour of soul which lends a charm to hardship and sacrifice. He will look back upon the fields—planted by the labours and watered by the sweat of his youth—which have yielded nothing. He will carry in his soul this sorrow, which was also that of Jesus Christ—whom neither heaven, earth, nor human being ever saw laugh, but who was often seen to weep by all. Contemplating a people always faithless ; calling to mind the ingratitude, obstinacy, weakness, cowardice, culpable ignorance and ever-recurring perversity ; and to have alas ! to admit that the Blood of his Master has, on account of human malice, been shed in vain ; he will bow his

head and hear within his heart an echo of the eternal lament : " Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . how often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings, and thou wouldest not ? " (Matt. xxiii. 37).

Such is the life of a *curé* : according to nature it is incomprehensible ; 'twere better called a slow and terrible death. Who will explain to us how it is that men are always to be found to wear out their life in such an obscure sphere ? Men who love the life, embrace it, devote themselves to it ; who as children have dreamed of it ? How can they subdue their own heart, by suppressing legitimate desires, renouncing worldly pleasure entirely, ridding themselves of all personal ambition, abandoning every wish for terrestrial fame ? It is God's secret, and the most wonderful triumph of His grace. " Oh ! if I had only known what it is to be a *curé*," M. Vianney often said, " instead of taking a parish, I would have sought refuge at La Trappe." For all that, he did not escape ; and though he twice attempted to leave his parish—as we shall see later—divine Providence did not permit him to succeed : willing that he should worthily fill the position for forty years.

At the time of which we write, the work of God in the hearts of the people of Ars was very manifest. The parish was no longer recognisable ; dances, cabarets, profanation of the Sabbath, and every other sort of scandal, were things of the past. The war of evil against good could only be carried on in secret. Nevertheless, some souls, as yet untouched by the zeal of their pastor, held out in their fastnesses of ignorance and religious insensibility, unaffected by the general movement ; others made no progress. These exceptions, rare as they were, distressed our generous apostle : he attributed them to his own sins.

Those who remember him then, describe him very much as we ourself knew him later on. Already the remarkable lines of his countenance were apparent, but with a more austere stamp, and a more energetic manner, in which strength was the salient feature—strength exuberant as yet, which rendered him very hard to himself and very rigid towards others. With years, grace, and practical experience of men and their weakness, we shall see this rough exterior gradually soften, and M. Vianney re-vested with the graces of meekness and mercy over his native severity. And as there is a genealogy of virtues, which come to birth one after the other ; so strength first brings forth humility, followed by charity, indulgence, longanimity, gentleness : so that, the less the *Curé* of Ars imposed his authority, the more it prevailed.

He seized every opportunity of making his parishioners enter into themselves, tracing their misfortunes to their faults, and causing them to see the hand of God in every event of their lives. We find in a letter written at this time a description of a terrific storm, which annihilated in a moment the hopes of the farmers on

the eve of the harvest. There had been no such disaster within living memory. The letter continues : " The holy Curé advised us this morning to weep, not over our losses but about our sins, which were the prime cause of all. . . . Mademoiselle d'Ars soon recovered calmness and confidence ; she laments the misfortunes of the peasants, but her gentle piety sees a trial where the *Father of the Desert* proclaims the judgment of heaven. ' You reap your crops,' he cried, ' without a thought of the God who gave them to you. Most of you have offended Him. He now says to you : ' I will now show you that these crops are mine—these crops that you receive from my hand, ignoring me the while. Save yourselves ! Return to me with all speed ! . . . I will take all back again ; I will destroy everything.' " "

M. Vianney held forth to his congregation without ceasing on the mercy and justice of God ; endeavouring by every possible means to inspire in them a terror of His judgments. He presented the joys of paradise and the horrors of hell in turn, and spoke of the reward of the just and the punishment of the sinner with supernatural eloquence. Thus :—

" Sin is the executioner of the good God and the assassin of the soul. It is that which drags us from heaven to cast us into hell. And we love it—what folly ! If we considered the matter aright, we should conceive such a lively horror of sin as would prevent us from committing one.

" Oh, my brethren, how ungrateful we are ! The good God would make us happy ; He has given us His law for that end alone. The law of God is large ; it is wide. King David said that in it he found his delight, and that it was to him a treasure more precious than great riches. Again : he said that he walked as on a spacious road, because he had sought the commandments of the Lord. The good God then, would have us be happy and we will not have it so : we turn away from Him and hand ourselves over to the devil ! We fly from our friend, to seek our executioner ! . . . We commit sin ; we wallow in the mire : once we are entangled therewith we know not how to extricate ourselves. Were it our worldly fortune that was concerned, we should not take this fatal step ; but because it is only our soul that is in question, there we remain . . .

" We come to confession pre-occupied with the shame we shall feel in making it. We make it at rail-road speed. It has been said that there are many who make their confessions, but few who are converted. I verily believe, my brethren, that there are very few who confess their sins with tears of contrition. The misfortune is, look you, that we do not reflect. Were one to ask of those who work on Sunday, of a young person who has spent two or three hours in dancing, of a man who leaves the cabaret tipsy : ' What have you done ? You have crucified our Lord afresh ! ' they would be very much astonished—because they

do not reflect. My brethren, if we only reflected on it, horror would come over us ; it would be impossible for us to do evil. What has the good God done that we should grieve Him so ; that we should cause Him to die once more—He who has rescued us from hell ? Well would it be, if every sinner betaking himself to guilty pleasures could—like St. Peter—meet our Lord Himself, who should say to him : ‘ I go whither thou goest thyself, there to be crucified anew.’ Perchance that would recall him to himself.

“ The saints understood the enormity of the outrage done to God by sin. Some there were who passed their lives weeping over their faults. This was what St. Peter did ; his last hour found him still weeping. St. Bernard used to say : ‘ Lord ! Lord ! it is I that have nailed Thee to the Cross.’

“ It is veritable folly, to be able to taste—even in this life—the joys of heaven, by union with God by love ; and yet to choose to make ourselves worthy of hell by union with the devil. Such folly is incomprehensible—never sufficiently to be deplored. It would appear by it that poor sinners, not content to await the sentence that will consign them to the society of devils, pass sentence on themselves. In this present life is a forecast of paradise, hell and purgatory. Paradise in the hearts of the perfect who are completely united with our Lord ; hell in those of the impious ; purgatory in the souls of those who are not dead to themselves.

“ Those who live in sin take unto themselves the habits and appearance of the beasts of the field. The beast, which is not endowed with reason, has nothing but appetites. In the same manner, the man who imitates them is bereft of reason and allows himself to be guided by the motions of his *carcase*. He find his pleasure in good eating and drinking and the enjoyment of the vanities of this world which pass like the wind. I commiserate those unhappy folk who pursue the wind. They barter their eternity for the miserable phantoms of the world.

“ This body of ours is a mass of corruption, destined for death and worms : *nothing else ! . . .* And yet we apply ourselves to gratify it, rather than to cultivate our soul which is so great that it is impossible to conceive anything greater : No, nothing ! nothing ! For we see that God, in the boundless ardour of His charity, would not create us like the animals ; He created us to His own image and likeness, you understand . . . Oh ! how great is man.

“ Man, created by love, cannot live without it ; either he loves God or he loves himself and the world. See, my brethren, it is faith we need . . . He who has no faith is blind. He who sees not knows not ; he who knows not loves not ; he who loves not God loves himself and his pleasures. He sets his heart on things that vanish as does the smoke. He is incapable of knowing

either the truth or anything that is good ; he can understand nothing but error because he has no light ; he is befogged. Had he but light, he would see at once that all he attaches himself to can only lead him to eternal death : it is a foretaste of hell.

“ Do you not see, my brethren, that outside the good God there is nothing substantial : nothing ! nothing ! If it is life, it passes ; if it is fortune, it falls to pieces ; if it be health, it fails ; if it be reputation, it is attacked. We pass like the wind . . . everything goes swiftly ; all passes from our grasp. Ah ! my God, my God : how greatly are they to be pitied who set their affections on these things ! . . . They do so because they love themselves too well, but not with a rational love ; they love themselves with a natural and worldly love, by seeking themselves and creatures more than God. That is why they are never satisfied, never peaceful ; they are always disquieted, always troubled, always upset.

“ See, my brethren, the good Christian travels through the world, occupying the seat of honour in a triumphal chariot driven by our Lord Himself. But the sinner is himself between the shafts ; and the devil who rides in the carriage plies the whip remorselessly to make him go . . . ”

On another occasion :—

“ My brethren, the three Acts of Faith, Hope, and Charity, include every happiness of man in this world. By faith we believe what God has promised, that we shall see and possess Him one day ; that we shall be with Him in heaven for ever. By hope we wait for these promises to be carried into effect : we hope to be rewarded for all our good actions, every holy thought, all our good desires—for God takes account even of good desires. What more is needed to render us happy ?

“ In heaven faith and hope will have no place ; for the mists which obscure our vision will be dispelled. Then we shall understand the things that are hidden from us here below. We shall hope for nothing—there will be nothing left to hope for. One does not hope for a treasure that one has already . . . But love ! Oh ! we shall be inebriated with it, drowned, overwhelmed in the immense charity of the Heart of Jesus . . . And charity is a foretaste of heaven. If we could understand it, feel it, appreciate it, how happy should we be. What makes us unhappy is that we do not love God.

“ When we say : ‘ My God, I believe : I firmly believe ’—that is, without the slightest doubt, the least hesitation. . . ! Oh ! if we were penetrated by these words : ‘ I firmly believe that Thou art everywhere present ; that Thou seest me ; that I am always in Thy sight ; that one day I shall myself see Thee clearly ; that I shall enjoy all the good things which Thou hast promised to give me . . . my God, I hope that Thou wilt recompense me for all that I shall have done to please Thee ’ . . . Oh ! how completely this Act of Faith, which is also an Act of Love, would suffice for

everything . . . Could we only understand the happiness that is ours in being able to love God, we should live motionless in ecstasy.

. . . If a prince, an emperor, caused one of his subjects to appear before him and said : ' I wish you to be happy : live with me ; share all the good things I have ; but beware lest you displease me in anything that is right,' what care, what earnestness, would this subject not put forth to satisfy his sovereign ? Well then : God has made the same proposals to us . . . and we do not value His friendship and set no store by His promises !'

For a long time M. Vianney wrote out his Sunday sermons ; and has since declared that the labour was a severe tax upon him and one of the greatest mortifications of his life. He composed each sermon at one sitting, working far into the night, shut up in the sacristy ; and sometimes wrote for seven hours without a break. He was persuaded that, to become an apostle, the priest should prepare the Bread of the Word in the sweat of his brow ; and that the merit of his endeavours would draw down the blessing of God on his ministry.

As he did not find his parishioners advance in the love of God as he would have wished, and fearing lest his own ignorance and shortcomings should be the cause of their indifference, he often called his colleagues of the neighbouring parishes to his assistance. He was never so pleased as when he was re-assured against his own fears of having done badly by the presence of a priest whom he thought more pious and enlightened than himself. Thus the Curés of St. Trivier, Jassans, Chaneins, and others, appeared in the pulpit of Ars, one after the other.

The blessing of God always descended on these pious efforts. Sinners were converted ; the good became better ; and several embraced the practice of the evangelical counsels.

" I believe," says Catherine, " that it will never be known what graces of conversion have been obtained, and how many souls have been saved owing to the prayers of M. le Curé ; and above all by the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass which he offered for eight successive days at the time of the Jubilee, for the eternal welfare of his parishioners. There was such a movement of hearts, that nearly everybody set to work with all their might to reform their lives. *Human respect is reversed*—people are ashamed *not* to practise their religion. When one meets the men, they have a grave and serious air. It is easy to see they are in good dispositions. Although M. Vianney has called in a strange priest to help him, nearly all elect to go to their own pastor. Thus M. le Curé was able to declare to his congregation—in a last sermon, in which he gave vent to the joy he felt : ' My brethren, Ars is no longer Ars. It is years since such a revolution has taken place in this parish. Many missions and jubilees have I taken part in ; but nowhere have I found such good dispositions as those that prevail here.' It is true (adds the pious annalist) that these

fervent motions have slackened somewhat ; but the good God still keeps the upper hand. Among us, religion is for the most part respected ; and those who practise it are not ridiculed."

At one time, two jubilees followed close upon one another. Complaints were not lacking concerning the frequency of jubilees, and the monotony of their repetition. As usual, the complainants were those whom the new favour accorded by the Holy See troubled the least, resolved beforehand as they were not to take advantage of it unless they chose. These complaints persisted and reached the ears of M. Vianney who, in announcing the commencement of the exercises in his Sunday sermon, took occasion to add : " They say that there was a jubilee last year ; and some are asking why there should be another one now ? . . . But, my friends, if some king or great person had given you three thousand francs ; and a short time after saw fit to double his gift, would that weary you ? Would you refuse the last three thousand francs because of the first you had already received ? "

An interior voice urged the Curé of Ars to combine his pastoral duties with his apostolic aspirations. He felt himself haunted by the desire of doing good to everyone, everywhere ; and not merely to labour for the glory of God, but for the greater glory of God. Was a curé absent : it was M. Vianney who was asked to take his place. He supplied for his reverend brethren when they were sick—a misfortune that often happened in the parish of Ambérieux-en-Dombes. If a cure became vacant by the movement or death of the incumbent, he took charge in the interim. This he did repeatedly for several years, serving the parishes of Savigneux, Rancé, St. Jean-de-Thurigneux, etc.

The Curé of Miserieux was a M. Ducreux. A fine old gentleman of eighty-two, he had the distinguished manners and exquisite politeness of the clergy of the old school ; and emphasised these qualities—common to most men of his period—by profound piety and learning, combined with good sense. M. Vianney acted as his vicaire ; and submitted to him in everything with the utmost deference.

Like most of the country clergy at this period of renovation—in which the necessity of filling the breaches in the ranks of the ministry was fully recognised—M. Ducreux delighted in the work of tuition. He had with him two or three little *Eliacims*,* to whom he taught the chants and ceremonies of the Church, at the same time as he imparted to them the rudiments of knowledge. To these children the Curé of Ars was a man of mark, of surprises and naïve discoveries. In their eyes, he was not an ordinary person ; he was a saint. They were curious to know what a saint said, what he did, and how he behaved. When he was present the little college was all eyes and ears ; so that not a

*Eliacims, successors in his office : cf. Is. xxii., 20.

gesture might be lost nor a syllable escape them. One of them has since told us that what struck him most, next to the fragile exterior and frightful thinness of M. Vianney, was his immutable refusal to accept the invitations of the good M. Ducreux to take a seat at his frugal table. He was complaisance itself on all other points, but inflexible on that one ; and would never do more than accept a little coffee without any sugar in it—and that only after much pressing.

Often he was called in the middle of the night to hear the confessions of the sick ; and responded at once, regardless of weather. Once he was so ill himself that he was compelled to lie down when he arrived ; he heard the confession of a dying person from bed, and had to be taken home in a carriage. His zeal always carried him beyond his strength.

The beginning of the year 1823 presented a fresh field of activity, and a most fertile one. He was asked by M. Pasquier, Curé of Trévoux, to take part in the great mission that was given at that time by the priests of the Society of Carthusians of Lyons ; and which brought abundant grace into a locality where sin had reigned undisputed. It caused a religious revival in the town, the memory of which still lives among the inhabitants.

The Abbé Ballet directed the mission. All who knew this apostolic man remember him as a most faithful friend, who made it his duty never to forget. Powerfully impressed by his life at the Seminary, where he had met the Abbé Vianney, he was not in the least surprised at his increasing renown ; and always cordially rejoiced at the good which it pleased out Lord to effect by his agency. He thought that, in the interest of the souls whom he hoped to bring back to God, he could do no better than associate M. Vianney with the mission as confessor. His friendly entreaties easily overcame the timidity and modest scruples of the good Curé.

M. Vianney never thought about his health when the good of souls and the glory of God were at stake ; he redoubled his exertions, relying on divine grace. Setting out from Ars on the Sunday evening or Monday morning, with his surplice over his arm, he walked the nine kilometres (a little over five miles and a half), through the worst weather, for it was the depth of winter. Saturday evening found him back in his own parish, passing the night in hearing the confessions of his people. M. Morel, Master of the Poorhouse and one of his fellow-students at Verrières, had offered him a bed and a place at his table. The offer was accepted in the same spirit in which it was made—with one condition however, that he might receive nothing more than the humble fare of an inmate. "It will be more quiet with you," M. Vianney had said, "I shall be freer, and not pressed to eat as I should be at other houses."

Much as he dreaded the modest dinners at the presbytery,

he had to put in an appearance at them now and then. One day, by way of enlivening matters a little, his colleagues proceeded to make an inspection of his apparel—a pleasantry that would have disconcerted anyone but the good Curé of Ars. Hiding their concern for his welfare under the appearance of innocent badinage, they agreed among themselves to make a subscription to supply the most urgent needs—it must be understood that some of them were very urgent. On the following Saturday, they presented him with a new pair of velvet knee-breeches, which they asked him to wear in remembrance of them. M. Vianney accepted and regained his parish in a severe frost. At the highest point on his way back, he had fallen in with a poor man who was half-naked and benumbed with cold. “You are very cold, my friend, aren’t you?” said the new St. Martin. Then, without waiting for a reply, he disappeared behind the hedge; and re-appeared a minute later—new breeches in hand. A day or two afterwards his friends called at the presbytery to make sure he was doing credit to their generosity. Somewhat embarrassed at their domiciliary visit, as he termed it, he laughed amiably and said: “As to what you so kindly gave me, well . . . I lent them to a poor man whom I met on *Les Bruyères*.”

Next Sunday, returning from his parish at nightfall, he reached a place called *Les Grandes Balmes*; and found another mendicant, who, bowed down by age, dared not risk the steep and slippery descent. The Curé of Ars took him by the arm, helped him down, and they reached the bottom safely, one supporting the other. M. Vianney then took the good old man on his back; and only put him down at the entrance of the town that he might not be caught in an act of charity.

During the five weeks the mission at Trévoux lasted, the Curé of Ars was overwhelmed by the general confidence reposed in him. His chapel never seemed to empty; and one day his confessional, which was not solidly fixed, was carried away. M. Ballet has told us that these marks of esteem came more especially from the educated classes. The members of the municipal council, the justiciary, functionaries, lawyers, nearly all made their confessions to him. The Sous-Préfet spoke of him with admiration; but while he eulogised the loftiness of his views, the wisdom of his counsels, and the kindly firmness of his direction, he declared mournfully that “this little Curé of Ars had been ruthless on the subject of the soirées and dances at the Sous-Préfecture. But,” added he, “he is quite right; and I shall strive to do as he says.”

M. Vianney was invariably the first to enter the church and the last to leave it. One evening when he had been detained later than usual, M. Morel went to seek him in the confessional and bring him home. It was as well he went, for, at the second step he took, the indefatigable workman of the Lord found his legs

giving way under him and his host carried him to his room in a state of collapse. Pressed to take a restorative, the Abbé Vianney raised difficulties, looked at his watch, urged that it was now very late, adding that he needed nothing, and that his weakness would go as it had come. Madame Morel, hearing all these objections, ventured to say : " Monsieur le Curé, you give penances to others and expect them to accept them. Now, let me give you one to-night—drink what I have brought you." " Ah ! well, what woman wills, Almighty God wills," said he with a smile ; and he accepted his penance.

On the eve of the general Communion with which the mission concluded, M. Morel went to the church about nine o'clock in the evening in search of his guest ; he found him besieged by such a dense crowd that any attempt at rescue was out of the question. He returned at midnight, to find matters much in the same state ; so he sat himself down to wait with what patience he could. At two o'clock there were just as many as before ; so he tried to get at the confessional and carry off the Curé bodily. At this there was an outcry : " If you take M. le Curé away, we shall not come again ; and you will be responsible before God." " What !" cried he, " M. Vianney did not leave the church yesterday until midnight ; he was back again at four o'clock. How much time has he had for rest ? His bed has not even been touched. As yesterday, he has still his Office to say ; and at four he will be here again. Which of you who cry out would do as much ?" This outbreak put an end to the complaints ; and M. Morel took the good Curé by the hand and led him home, too much exhausted to resist.

The wonders of the mission at Trévoux rendered the name of M. Vianney famous far and wide. Dating from this time, he never had a moment he could call his own. The curés competed among themselves to secure his services. The Jubilee of 1826 arrived ; and gained for a great number of people the benefit of his co-operation, so much desired by all. The humble missionary was called in turn to Montmerle, St. Trivier, Savigneux, Chaneins, and St. Bernard-près-Trévoux. In the latter parish he was single-handed ; and from the outset the aspect of the village changed. At the first stroke of the bell, the peasants left their work and nobody was to be seen in the fields. Servants importuned their mistress for permission to go to hear the Curé of Ars : " We are quite willing," they said, " to have the amount due for the time we lose taken off our wages." " A first-rate workman, this," said the Curé of St. Bernard, " I have never seen his equal ; he labours incessantly and eats nothing."

On the occasion of some local solemnity M. Vianney was invited to preach at Lima—a charming little parish in the suburbs of Villefranche. He did his best to refuse, deeming himself unworthy of the honour. But the Curé of Lima, who had a great

regard for him, clung to his purpose ; he insisted, urging that, as the feast fell on a week-day, the congregation was unlikely to be numerous or difficult to please. M. Vianney could no longer demur ; only, when the day arrived he had nothing prepared—confessions having taken up all his time. In the extreme diffidence in his own powers which possessed him before he had, by continual practice in the pulpit, acquired the wonderful facility which everyone has since admired, he experienced on his way to Lima all the miseries of public speaking which those only understand who have felt them—the night-mare of a man condemned to walk without legs—and it seemed to him that he could find neither words nor ideas. When he arrived, Vespers had begun ; and he found the church crowded. At the announcement of a sermon by the holy Curé of Ars, the élite of Villefranche society had assembled in a spirit of lively curiosity ; and upwards of five-and-twenty priests occupied the sanctuary. The sight of such an imposing gathering completed the discomfiture of the preacher, who thought his courage was going to fail him. Having commended himself to Him who has promised a voice and wisdom to His apostles when they need them for His work, he emerged from his state of recollection as from an inner sanctuary : he was simple, incorrect of speech possibly, but filled with the Spirit of Truth. He spoke of the love of God in a way that only saints can speak ; and brought tears to eyes very little accustomed to shed them over such a subject.

While thus labouring for the souls of others, M. Vianney was always mindful of the needs of his own. He endeavoured to sanctify himself, in order to become a more efficient instrument for the sanctification of his neighbour. Nor did he neglect the repose to be sought in prayer that the Master prescribed to His disciples. He had acquired the apostolic habit of substituting action for recollection when necessity arose ; and resuming his state of recollection and prayer when the necessity had passed. He satisfied his craving for prayer by those continued and spontaneous aspirations which ascend to the presence of God like the bird to its nest. He gave considerable time to meditation, besides that which he devoted to his favourite study of the lives of the saints and visits to the Blessed Sacrament—which were not hurried and casual calls, but long hours spent prostrate at the feet of our Lord, where his devotion completely absorbed him. For him work was but the prolongation of prayer ; and whether he spoke to God or spoke of Him, he desired to love Him or cause others to do so.

It does not appear that the interests of his parish ever suffered on account of his numerous apostolic excursions. He only accepted the office of missionary in so far as it was compatible with his duties as curé. The bee flits from flower to flower but never forgets her hive, and she is careful to deposit her honey

there. Outside the occasions where he was engaged in one or other of his missionary works he never passed a night away from home. No one can recall a single occasion on which he was absent for his own pleasure—even in the days when he could have easily left his parish without detriment to anybody. This is brought out in a letter lent us by the venerable M. Nestor, one of the missionaries of Lyons. It bears one of the rare autographs of the Curé of Ars ; and is such a faithful reflection of his saintly soul that we cannot forbear transcribing it for the edification of our readers. It is in reply to an invitation of the Abbé Ballet ; who wished to meet, at Villefranche, the priest who had rendered such great assistance at Trévoux.

“Ars, 1st January, 1826.

“Much respected Sir,

“Permit me, if you please, to express my astonishment that your great charity should have led you to desire that I had been able to present my humble respects to you in person. But, two things deprived me of this pleasure : the first being that, as you had no evening sermon to preach, you had only that brief interval in which to rest. I should have thought it an offence against God to disturb you. The second is that I esteemed myself unworthy to be admitted into such respected company. When I received your invitation, I began to rejoice in the pleasant anticipation of being with you on Tuesday for the erection of the Cross ; but the needs of my sick parishioners prevent it. May God be praised in all things !

“Allow me, much respected Sir, since you are so good and charitable as to retain such a kindly remembrance of me, to wish you a holy life and a long one ; so that it may be given to you to bring many souls to God. Also let your much respected Superior find herein the expression of all the esteem, reverence, and gratitude that my heart is capable of feeling for him. If it be not too indiscreet, I would ask you to beg the gentlemen at Villefranche to accept my humble respects.

“M. Chevallon has effected much good in my parish. A great number of old sinners have returned to God. The present is a very happy time for me ; but I conclude, lest I weary you.

VIANNEY, priest.”

Saints have a style of their own, and I think there is character in this letter. The Curé of Ars always carried with him the good odour of Jesus Christ ; as can be seen in the lines that an excellent priest addressed to Mgr. de Langalerie, as an official document, a short time after M. Vianney's death :—

“I have to go back forty years to recall the occasion of my first reminiscence of this venerable man.

“It was in 1820, when I was twelve years old. We were prac-

tising, in the courtyard of the college where I made my studies, to strew flowers for the procession of Corpus Christi; when a priest, very simple, poor and humble in appearance, came in. One of my companions said to us: 'That is the Curé of Ars; *he is a saint . . .* he lives on nothing but boiled potatoes.' I regarded him with astonishment. When one of our number addressed a few polite words to him, he stopped for an instant and, smiling kindly on us, said: 'My friends, when you scatter your flowers before the Blessed Sacrament, hide your hearts in your baskets, and send them amid the roses to Jesus Christ.' Then, without making any other visit, he crossed the courtyard and repaired to the college chapel to pay his respects to the Master of the house in His tabernacle. I have forgotten nearly all the names of my fellow-students and almost everything that happened at the time; but the words of that priest, his visit to the Blessed Sacrament, and the remark of my school-fellow have never faded from my memory. What struck me most (for I was a little gourmand) was the idea of a man *living on potatoes*. I understood, without being able to account for it, that this implied something rare and wonderful; and it is probably this that has kept the memory alive when most other things have passed out of my recollection.

"Ten years from that, by a train of circumstances the details of which belong to the history of the mercies of God towards me, I found myself a member of the Greater Seminary. Then the remembrance of that priest, so mortified and so devout to the Blessed Sacrament, returned. In the interval he had advanced much in general estimation; and though his fame had not then attained the height at which we have seen it during the last fifteen years of his life, there was already a great sensation about him. People had begun to seek him from every direction—the good for edification; sinners to discharge the burden of their sins and their remorse into the bosom of the man of God. The miracle of his daily life—austere beyond all description—excited the unbounded admiration of everyone. One cannot understand how he could possibly live on so small an amount of nourishment. And what else is not said concerning him? And these reports—to which the world is not accustomed in these times of ours—have since been amply confirmed."

CHAPTER XVII

THE PROVIDENCE OF ARS. ITS HUMBLE BEGINNING AND THE VARIOUS MIRACLES WORKED BY OUR LORD TO SUSTAIN IT

And he that administereth seed to the sower, will both give you bread to eat, and will multiply your seed, and increase the growth of the fruits of your justice: That being enriched in all things, you may abound unto all simplicity, which worketh through us thanksgiving to God. (II. Cor. ix., 10-11).

From the stores of poverty, holy Francis satisfies the hungry family of Christ. (Franciscan hymn).

A NOTABLE part of man's duty is comprised in using his faculties of mind and body in the endeavour to make others better and happier.

"By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another" (John xiii, 35). And, commenting on these beautiful words, this same Apostle who transmitted the "new Commandment" of his Master (John xiii, 34) has repeated in his letters: "Dearly beloved, let us love one another, for charity is of God . . . By this the charity of God appeared to us, because God hath sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we may live by him . . . if God hath so loved us; we also ought to love one another . . . In this is the charity of God perfected with us . . . because as he is, we also are in this world." (1 Jo. iv., 7-9-11-17).

M. Vianney earnestly desired to attain to this true charity; he wished to be in this world such as He was who "went about doing good" (Acts x. 38). While he was ever progressing in the love of God by the contemplation of the divine Example, he felt within himself that his love for suffering humanity was sensibly increasing.

It would have been passing strange had he not loved suffering humanity—he in whom the heart was such a prominent source of action. Up to now, we have seen him evince this love in works that directly led his neighbour to God: that is doubtless the first of charities; but it is never alone, for it carries another in its train. "For he that loveth not his brother, whom he seeth, how can he love God, whom he seeth not?" (1 Jo., iv. 20.) Converse with God is a delightful thing, but it is when one has done the most good to men that it is more particularly enjoyable. Piety is renewed by virtue; and the good works we put between ourselves and heaven form the conducting element for grace. Good works then, were a necessary of life to our Saint, to satisfy his love of God. Ever since he came to Ars he had dreamed of them, he saw himself surrounded by misery without end; he

would have liked to have assuaged every misfortune, or at any rate the most pressing among them. The establishment of a *Providence*, or asylum for orphan-girls, was the scheme that first suggested itself: by a single stroke it would meet the wants of three necessitous classes—sex, age, and homelessness.

This work—like all God's works—commenced in quite a humble way. Behind the choir of the church and to the east of the village square there was a newly-built house of sufficiently solid construction. "If that house were only mine," said M. Vianney, "I would turn it into a *Providence*. On leaving the church I should only have to step across the square to visit my little family, give a catechism, and take my meal. The *Providence* would give me my bread; and I would distribute to the inmates the Word of Truth, which is the bread of the soul. I should receive the necessities of this life in exchange for those of the life to come. I should like that right well."

Little by little the idea germinated in his brain and took definite shape. But, before committing himself to any decided step by addressing himself to the owner of the house, he would, as always, consult heaven on the matter. Therefore he announced a novena in honour of our Blessed Lady: "She has such love for the poor, who are the friends of her Son, that she will most certainly come to my assistance," he said. And, that he might not seem to tempt God by asking miracles, he began by doing everything that lay in his own power.

His habitual benevolence of each day invariably left him without a sou for the needs of the morrow. His slender salary always seemed to be mortgaged before it reached his hands. The same was true of the little pension he received from his brother Francis as his share of the patrimonial estate. His correspondence with his family had this much in common with that of the young soldier in barracks: that he was in need of money, and would they send him some? Thus, he writes on 20 June, 1820:—

"My dear Brother, I have something to ask, which I trust you will not refuse: it is that you will advance me a year's pension, as I owe a good deal of money. I beg you not to leave me in difficulties. I shall be most grateful to you . . ."

Another letter of 2nd June, 1822, is to much the same effect:

"My dear Brother, In sending you news of my health, which continues very much the same, I write to say that if you can send me my pension for the whole year it would be a kindness; for I have just made an important addition to my church. Could you but advance me that of the year to come, it would be better still. My brother-in-law, Melin, kindly wrote that he would give me 100 crowns; but that will not be enough. I venture to hope, my dear Brother, that you will do me this favour . . ." Expressions of family affection follow, but he ends by assuring his brother of his *very humble respect*—his usual formula.

On the present occasion, as his present and prospective revenues were insufficient, he determined to realise all his little property and devote the capital to the foundation of his *Providence*. The house cost 20,000 francs, which was about the value of his interest in the family domain at Dardilly. We learn from Catherine that when he had purchased the house he "had not the wherewithal to defray the legal expenses."

But such a work as he contemplated is not set on foot merely by having four walls and a roof. To whom should he confide the management? In the gratitude of his heart his first thoughts turned to the Sisters of St. Charles. They it was who, as we have already seen, disguised in secular attire during the Reign of Terror, had prepared him for First Communion. Also he thought of calling in the Congregation of St. Joseph whom Mgr. Devie, the new Bishop of Belley, had recently reconstituted—offering them the noviciate of Bourg. But reasons with which we are unacquainted influenced him in his final decision to look elsewhere.

Among the young women of his parish amenable to firm direction and capable of assimilating a good education were two, Benoîte Lardet and Catherine Lassagne; and these he judged to be the most suitable persons for the execution of his design. They were distinguished for intelligence, common sense and tried virtue. He sent them to the Sisters of Fareins for a year to complete their education; after which he again took them under his own wing and set to work to ground them solidly in poverty, obedience, humility and simplicity, together with entire self-abandonment to divine Providence. Though they were not bound by vows, this amounted to the practice of religious life in a very high degree; but while they were to be reclothed interiorly with all that is most perfect in the religious calling, they were not to esteem themselves worthy to wear the livery of the spouses of Jesus Christ.

After a time M. Vianney thought he could safely utilise the services of the two and begin work. "One of them," said he, "will be the *head* (Benoîte) and the other the *heart*." Nothing could have been more simple and touching than the opening; the hand of God showed itself in the clearest manner, and one can trace its action working—in defiance of human reason—in lowliness and humility. Catherine has told the story; which we reproduce literally, lest its evident air of truth and ingenuousness should suffer from being edited:—

"When the two foundresses arrived, there was nothing in the house in the way of food beyond a pot of butter and some dry cheese sent in by a kind young woman. They brought with them from home their beds, linen, and other indispensables. On the opening day there was no bread. After having cleaned the house down they thought of going home to get something to eat. But they said: 'Let us stop here; perhaps Providence

will send us some dinner.' Providence did not fail them, for the mother of one thought of her daughter and sent in her dinner, which she shared with her companion ; a little later the latter received her own. They had all they wanted, and next day made some bread."

A few days after, the staff was increased by the arrival of a good widow from Chaleins; and, later on, by a young woman from Jassans, Jeanne-Marie Chaney. This last was the *arm*, which came to attach itself to the *head* and *heart*. She was strong, and took over the heavy work ; made the bread, did the washing and tended the garden. Catherine continues :—

" M. le Curé began by opening a free school for the little girls of the parish. Next he admitted a few children from the neighbouring parishes, who paid for their own keep when they lived in the house. They received, not all who presented themselves but as many as they had room for. Since space was limited at first, M. le Curé thought of everything and provided for all their wants day by day. A short time afterwards a lady came to Ars from Lyons who, without wishing to reside at the *Providence*, found pleasure in the company of the directresses. As she had some means she undertook the expenses of the housekeeping, which was a great relief and satisfaction to M. Vianney. Presently, when he wanted to purchase wood and ground for the maintenance of the household, she helped him still more."

M. le Curé's first idea was to acquire some land and sustain the establishment on the produce ; but he found difficulty in getting it cultivated, so he sold it all to M. le Comte de Cibeins, who, to assist further, offered him the annual income of certain investments. M. le Curé found an excellent cashier in him !

Thus he was enabled to receive a few poor children : and he began with two or three orphans. The number increased rapidly. M. le Curé helped the new-born community by every means in his power and by the grace of God they became self-supporting. But it was not enough to be self-supporting ; it must grow. It has been said that there is a species of vegetation about charity. Love of the neighbour is the seed, prayer is the dew that waters the seed ; beneficence and prayer grafted one on the other supply the sap. Beneficence conceives the idea, prayer obtains the means of execution ; beneficence becoming more enterprising and prayer always more insistent, behold ! resources multiply themselves as if by a miracle. The *Providence* of Ars was hardly opened when the question was mooted how to take in more orphans than the place would hold. They must build. Thereupon M. le Curé became architect, mason and carpenter combined. He spared himself in nothing : cut and carried stone, made mortar, only interrupting his hard and beloved labour to go to the confessional.

In a very short time, with the help of sundry charitable persons, some unexpected alms, the protection of the saints and the blessing

of God, it was possible to receive in the enlarged house more than sixty young girls—lodged, fed and instructed, at the costs of the *Providence*: preserved from vagabondage and its attendant evils, kept beyond the reach of bad example, directed in the right way, and safe from the dangers that had formerly beset them, in an atmosphere fragrant with the good odour of Jesus Christ. Each new arrival was received as becomes charity to receive the poor—with more kindness than if they had paid a pension, and the most intense desire to lead them into all good. Those who had the care of them deprived themselves of everything so that the little orphans might want for nothing. In the eyes of the holy founder they were not only objects of the most tender care, inasmuch as they were unhappy and forsaken, but they appeared to him as representatives of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who accepts the good done to the least of His poor as benefits conferred upon Himself in person.

The orphanage of the Curé of Ars was the precursor of the *Providence* of Bourg, and the model for the numerous establishments bearing the same name, which to-day cast their hospitable shadows over the face of France. The finest works of God have the feeblest and most obscure origin. He seems to wish to associate to His own creative force, which called all things from nothing, those who by the most complete trust in Him, and the most generous self-forgetfulness, confide everything to His almighty power. When we regard the things that are really great and useful in the world around us, we find nothing but what has been accomplished with confidence in God and in the true spirit of the Gospel. And, when we examine more closely and seek to discover which of these things bears the mark of an altogether higher order, once more we find that all of them were founded on humility and nothingness. Great things are the simplest. One word of the Master will explain: "The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard-seed" (Matt. xiii., 31). It is the smallest of seeds, but when God blesses it, when He overshadows it with His almighty power it becomes a great tree. We should respect the grain of mustard-seed when we meet with it here below as the figure of the kingdom of God on earth, the symbol of His wisdom and power.

Thus commenced the *Providence* of Ars—as do all the works to which God puts His hand—in poverty and humility: it would seem that they are almost conditions of their existence. Nevertheless, there is an aid that never fails them, even from the beginning: it is the poor themselves. True it is that in the poor are riches, for hardly has the first one passed the door than difficulties disappear and resources come in: one would be tempted to say that divine Providence had followed close upon his heels. This was noticeable in the work of the Curé of Ars. During a quarter-of-a-century it was sustained without visible support—no budget, revenue or capital, and expenses running into 6—7000

francs per annum. And from this time it was that M. Vianney commenced to enjoy unlimited credit with the secret funds of divine Providence, which permitted him to realise everything on which he set his heart. Bankers he found wherever Providence has agents ; and we know that the agents of divine Providence are everywhere. Whenever he had a little money he at once purchased corn, wine and wood ; all the rest came of itself.

Notwithstanding, there were some critical times : moments of supreme anxiety in which one would almost have said that the celestial purveyor had withdrawn His assistance. But it is just when all seems lost that the situation is saved. The divine wisdom loves these surprises, for it is in them that it shows, at one and the same time, the happy confidence in which we may live in dependence upon it ; the power of the divine means and the futility of our own. "When God," says Bossuet, "would manifest that a work is entirely His own He reduces everyone concerned to impotence and despair ; then He stretches forth His hand." On two occasions, among others, this intervention was so direct, sudden, and accompanied by circumstances so marvellous and inexplicable, that it is impossible to see other than the miraculous.

Here are the facts, told us by the actual witnesses who are still living. One day the directresses had hardly any flour left, the stock of bread was exhausted, and there was no baker in the village. Meanwhile there were upwards of eighty mouths to be satisfied—what was to be done ? The Superior of the house, Benoîte Lardet, was at her wits' end. One of the mistresses, Jeanne Filliat, suggested to Jeanne-Marie Chaney who did the baking : "Might we not bake the trifle of flour that remains, while we are waiting ?" "I have been thinking of doing so," replied Jeanne-Marie, "but we must first hear what M. le Curé has to say." So she went to tell the holy priest of her difficulties : "Monsieur le Curé, the miller has not sent us back our flour and we have not enough left to make more than two loaves." "Put your yeast into the flour you have," replied M. Vianney, "close your kneading-trough, and to-morrow go on with your baking as usual." This advice was taken literally and followed exactly.

"I don't know how it happened," said Jeanne-Marie Chaney, "but the next day as I kneaded the dough rose under my hands ; I could not pour in water fast enough ; the more I poured the more the dough swelled and thickened—so much so, that in a few minutes the trough was quite full . . . We made the usual batch of ten large loaves of twenty to twenty-two pounds apiece, and with a handful of flour—as much as we were accustomed to make with a whole sackful."

Has not the good Master, who deigned to multiply the loaves and fishes in the desert, said : "He that believeth in me, the works that I do, he also shall do ; and greater than these shall he do."

(John xiv., 12) ? The story was told us in all its details by Jeanne-Marie Chaney, who kneaded the dough ; also by Jeanne and Marie Filliat and Catherine Lassagne. To these good women the miracle never presented any sort of doubt. " Oh ! how pleased we were to eat this bread," they added.

Once again there was no more bread in the orphanage at Ars ; and neither corn, flour, nor money in the house. For a moment the good Curé thought God had abandoned him on account of his sins. Sometimes a mother will play with the child she nurses by withdrawing herself for an instant, to restore it to her bosom at the first cry. Having sent for the Superior of the house, M. Vianney said to her, with a very full heart : " We shall have to send away our poor children then, since we cannot find food for them ! " But before proceeding to this extremity he went to look into the granary once more. He ascends slowly, with that vague feeling of hope and fear which at first causes doubt even about ascertained facts. Trembling, he opens the door . . . the granary is full !—full, as if corn had been poured into it by sacksful. The Curé of Ars was accompanied in this visit to the granary by Jeanne-Marie Chaney. He hastens down to his orphans, to tell them of this new marvel. " I distrusted Providence, my poor little ones ; I was going to send you away . . . The good God has well punished me." This was his favourite reflection when he received any particular mark of protection at the hands of the divine goodness ; he regarded it as a loving chastisement for his want of confidence.

The news of this prodigy soon got beyond the walls of the establishment and spreading through the village, was received with tears of joy and cries of admiration. The Maire of Ars, Antoine Mandy, who has often told the story to his children, came to see the miraculous corn, bringing with him the elders of the village. The miller was sent for ; and he, as he filled his sacks, declared he had never handled such fine wheat.

Some years afterwards, during a visit to Ars, Mgr. Devie tried to sound the Curé and get his direct testimony to a fact so extraordinary. Under pretext of inspecting the presbytery, he mounted to the granary. Then, turning suddenly on M. Vianney, who was not on his guard, and placing his hand against the wall, the Bishop remarked, casually : " The corn came up to here, didn't it ? " " No, Monseigneur," naïvely replied the Curé of Ars, showing a place still higher, " it was as high as this."

Many a time has the Curé of Ars been heard to allude to this miracle, which he attributed to St. John Francis Regis, whom he had constituted Administrator of his *Providence*. We ourself have heard him say several times, " One day when I had nothing for my poor orphans to eat it entered my head to hide the relics of St. John Francis Regis in the little corn we had left. Next day we were very rich."

While on the subject of miracles mention may be made of the following, which was told us by Jeanne and Marie Filliat. One day when one of them went down to the cellar she found the wine flowing out of the cask. Running with all speed to the *Providence*, she said to M. le Curé: "I'm afraid the wine is all running out." "Nothing to make yourself uneasy about," replied M. Vianney, calmly. "He who has allowed the wine to flow out can easily cause it to return to its cask." Marie Filliat returned to the cellar with her sister, and found the wine had flowed to such purpose that only a very little was left. She promptly filled two small vessels with the clearest of the wine on the floor, and having made sure there was no more leakage, poured their contents back into the barrel. By the side of this barrel was a smaller one, from which about half—some fifty bottles—had been already drawn. The remaining half they now poured into the almost empty big barrel. When the two sisters had done this one of them put her finger into the bung-hole, at which the other laughed. "You want to see if it is full, eh?" She might well laugh, seeing they had poured about thirteen gallons into a cask made to hold forty-four. "Yes," replied she . . . "and it *is* full . . . try for yourself." She tried, she felt the wine, and was lost in astonishment. "This wine, like that of Cana, proved to be excellent," added the good women, "and of far better quality than that which we usually drank at the *Providence*."

We have sought to reproduce with literal exactitude the account of this miracle; attested several times and always in the same manner by Catherine Lassagne, Jeanne-Marie Chaney, and the two sisters Jeanne and Marie Filliat. In the account it is easy to recognise the testimony of those who relate what they have seen with their own eyes, and with a simplicity that inspires confidence, and which we have scrupulously preserved.

From the same informants we hear of a dish of vegetables which M. le Curé distributed among the children one day at dinner. "He made the portions so large," says Catherine, "that I felt sure there would not be enough to go round. I ventured to say to him: 'Monsieur le Curé, if you go on helping them like this, you will not have sufficient for all—it is impossible.' He took no heed, helped everybody as liberally as before; and yet there was something left in the dish when all had been served. I could hardly believe my own eyes."

I think no one need be astonished at this last incident. It is no more surprising than the others. All we have related in this chapter owed their origin to the same loving and beneficent power. Is it more difficult to augment a dish of vegetables than to send any other kind of assistance when and where it is needed?

Once again: M. Vianney had purchased a considerable quantity of corn from a parishioner. Not being able to pay the vendor out of hand, he asked a little delay, which was willingly granted.

The day of reckoning arrived as usual ; there was no money—also as usual. He took his stick, and when he reached the open country began to recite his rosary, commending his dear orphans to the goodness of the Lord and the compassionate heart of His holy Mother, who is also the Mother of His poor. There was no delay in the answer, for at the moment he arrived at the outskirts of the wood which encircles the parish towards Juis, a woman presents herself suddenly. “ Are you M. le Curé of Ars ? ” “ Yes, my good woman.” “ Here is some money I have been told to give you.” “ Is it for Masses ? ” “ No, Monsieur le Curé : only remember the donor in your prayers.” Wherewith she empties her purse into his hands, turns and retires without saying who she is or who has sent her.

We must not linger if we are to relate all the episodes in which for over twenty years the divine mercy was pleased to show itself in favour of him who despoiled himself of everything for God and His poor. Despite his humility, M. Vianney was often constrained to avow that everything at Ars had been providential, and say, with a grateful smile, “ We certainly are rather the spoilt children of the good God.”

It was in truth a very wonderful thing to see how such a numerous household could be supported on so little, get through the year, and often have enough to spare for the needs of others. To quote only one instance : An unfortunate father of a family, reduced to living on the produce of the single field about his house, got one day to such straits as to have no food for his wife and five children. He sought M. le Curé, and told the tale of his distress. “ Go,” said the charitable pastor, at once, “ go to my granary, and take as much corn as you can carry away.”

We know that this story was constantly repeated. It is in no way astonishing. The God whom we serve is the great God ; therefore He can do everything with the smallest means or none at all ; and He habitually aids in the works of those who do all their works for His sake. This marvellous gift of multiplication is bestowed on those whose works are inspired by the motive of perfect charity. Our Lord is not content to intervene in their behalf by ordinary methods ; He owes it to Himself, in some sort, to sustain them by extraordinary ones—miracles, to wit. At the *Providence* of Ars money always arrived by secret channels, in unexpected manners, and at the moment when most wanted. Often did M. Vianney find considerable sums in his drawer, which he was certain he had never put there himself.

“ When I think of the care the good God has always taken of me,” said he, “ and when I recapitulate His benefits and His mercies, the joy and gratitude of my heart overflow. I know not whither to turn . . . on every side I see nothing but an abyss of love in which I would willingly lose myself and be drowned . . . I particularly recall two occasions. During my studies I was over-

whelmed with trouble . . .” [The Curé of Ars never explained the cause of his trouble ; but one may surmise that it was the difficulty he experienced in his studies, and the fear of not being able to complete them.] “ I knew not what to do ; . . I can see the place now—close to the house of Mère Bibost—where something, as it were a voice whispering in my ear, said to me : ‘ Be at peace ; thou shalt be a priest some day . . . ’ ”

“ Another time, when I was much disquieted and wearied, I heard the same voice say, distinctly : ‘ What has ever been wanting to thee up till now ? ’ And indeed I have always had all that was necessary . . . I have noticed that those who have means are continually complaining ; always in want of something. But nothing is ever wanting to those who have nothing . . . It is good to throw oneself entirely without reserve and for always into the arms of divine Providence. Our reserves arrest the current of His mercies and our want of confidence dams up the stream of His benefits . . . I have often thought that if we were to abandon our state of poverty we should not have the wherewithal to live ; . . Then let us repose sweetly in the arms of this good Providence, so mindful of all our wants. God loves us more than the best of fathers, more than the most tender mother. We have but to submit and commit ourselves to His will with childlike hearts. These poor orphans are not really your daughters, you are not really their mothers. And yet, do you imagine they doubt your tenderness or solicitude ? . . . It is confidence God demands before anything else. When He alone has charge of all our interests He will, in His justice and goodness, come to our assistance.”

With these and similar words did M. Vianney revive the spirits of the directresses in times of difficulty when their courage faltered. There was nothing he recommended more insistently than to throw themselves headlong into the bosom of divine Providence, there to bury their preoccupations and fears ; anxious only to love God, serve Him with all their strength and devote themselves to the relief and instruction of their scholars. These good women responded joyously. They had besought God to bless their enterprise and to look with favour on their attempt at common life. For the rest ; in taking possession of their new house they were not the only ones to enter ; for they had led our Lord along with them, who has promised that where two or three are gathered together in His name He will be in their midst.

CHAPTER XVIII

LIFE AT THE PROVIDENCE AND THE VIRTUES THAT WERE PRACTISED THERE

What is more noble than to train the mind and form the character of youth? For my part, I esteem the man who devotes himself to the excellent task of cultivating the souls of the young far above the painter and the sculptor. (St. John Chrys., Hom. xl.)

"Father, how can you talk of treasure in a place where there is so much poverty, and even necessities are wanting?" "That is what I call a great treasure, since nothing here below is the work of human industry; but all is ordered by divine Providence, as may be seen by this bread given by charity and the table on which it stands. . . . That is why I would that we should ask God to make us love the priceless treasure of holy poverty, which enlists even God Himself in its service." (Sayings of St. Francis of Assisi.)

THE object of M. Vianney in founding his little institution of the *Providence* was to open an asylum for the poorest and most neglected children. Everything in it was essentially gratuitous, except during its earliest days, when, having absolutely nothing on which to support the establishment, he consented to accept a modest stipend from those parents in easy circumstances who confided their children to his care. But that period did not last long, and thereafter he would only admit orphans who were destitute, homeless, and could not be educated otherwise.

The lot of those who had to beg in the streets appeared to him most to be pitied. It is the deplorable fate of the child of poverty to be exposed before the age of reason to all the seductions of evil, the snare of bad companionship, the scandal of bad conversation, the contagion of bad example, the often perverse influence of children of their own age, and sometimes the behests of godless employers. His heart was filled with compassion at seeing these poor creatures grow up in the neglect of God, in the school of all the vices that want engenders, where neither fear nor shame suffice to restrain their scandalous precocity.

The number of the inmates was not precisely fixed. Everyone who presented herself was admitted, without other qualifications than poverty, abandonment, and presumed need of soul and body. If there was any preference, it was for the most necessitous. The warmest welcome was accorded to girls of fifteen, eighteen, and even twenty years of age, whom their parents had allowed to grow up in ignorance of their duties, in vagabondage, or in the service of people careless alike of their soul and their virtue. This preference was justified by results. "It is noticeable," says Catharine, "that the happiest fruits of conversion and perseverance have accrued in those who were no longer children. They had no sooner heard the catechisms of M. le Curé, than they found them-

selves in another world. Nearly all—one might almost say all—of them asked to make a general confession ; they repented them sincerely of their past sins and became fervent Christians."

There were also many younger ones. They were received at the age of six or seven, and never sent out before they had made their First Communion. When they had spent a term of years in this noviciate, more or less prolonged according to the needs of each, situations were found for them. Most were placed with employers carefully selected and of known high principles. The younger of them only went out to service during the summer ; as winter came on they returned to the *Providence* to recruit spiritually and bodily. Finally : towards the age of nineteen—as a rule—they were definitely restored to society. When the good Christian housewife needed a servant she knew where she could find one. From time to time these girls in service would get leave to come back to see their benefactor, and it was a red-letter day on both sides. The Curé exhorted and encouraged them, sending them back peaceful and confirmed in their resolution to belong to God, and serve Him with increased zeal and fidelity.

If any one of them showed a desire to enter religion, M. le Curé chose the congregation to which he thought her best fitted, provided her trousseau, her dowry, and paid all her expenses, either from his own pocket or from the funds that Providence sent him. Any who thought of getting married he placed with good families, and took the place of their father until they did so. Thus they made a home of their own, and brought up their children in the fear of God and love of that holy poverty they had themselves been taught to love.

Anywhere else than Ars this heterogeneous mixture of children from everywhere, boarders and day-scholars, older girls and younger ones, would have appeared highly dangerous ; and the very diverse elements would hardly have been able to amalgamate without harm to one another. But here there was no difficulty or complication experienced ; the virtue which had formed the mistresses communicated itself unconsciously to their pupils. It was only the astonishing influence of this virtue—carried almost to its highest, sometimes—that could have established and maintained such a state of things. Naturally there were some failures, and others were unable to persevere ; but they were exceedingly few. " It will never be known, until the Day of Judgment," M. Vianney used to say, " how much good has been effected in this house." When he wished to obtain any particular grace he set his little community to pray ; and meanwhile redoubled his own fasts, penances, and alms ; and he was sure of obtaining what he asked. He thought—and with reason—that the hands of the poor are the best channels for the reception and diffusion of divine grace.

It would be foreign to our subject to enter upon a long discussion on the conduct of this establishment—so unique in

itself, and so difficult of comprehension in respect to the spirit that guided it. This can only be described as the spirit of the Curé of Ars. His seal was impressed upon it, and it was formed to his own image. This was to be remarked even in the smallest details of internal organisation. One whose testimony is of incontestable value wrote :—

“ I have examined this work with great care ; and I place it far above those of the same nature which have been founded by charity. My first impression was surprise ; but my surprise very soon developed into admiration.”

It was not the routine of our public schools and charitable institutions that was followed here. It was something much more simple ; and conceived on the lines of a poor but profoundly Christian family ; where the presence of God penetrates and dominates all hearts ; where the thought of the supernatural is not relegated to the brief prayers that mark the beginning and end of the day, but form the framework on which the whole life is built.

The *Providence* of Ars corresponded perfectly to the ideal held up by one of the most distinguished and least-suspect of our statesmen in respect to popular education : “ This education must be given and received in a religious atmosphere ; and religious impressions and habits of mind should pervade the whole. Religion is not a study or exercise, having its proper time and place assigned to it ; it is a law—a law which should make itself felt always and everywhere, and which can only exert its salutary influence in its entirety under this condition ” (M. Guizot, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de mon temps*, t. 3).

The instruction, without ceasing to be elementary, was solid. The children were taught according to their capacity and probable needs in life, to read, write, sew, and knit. Putting on one side things that were useless, they were not left in ignorance of anything that could, by education of head and heart, prepare them for the happiness of the world to come and the welfare of the house they would one day be called upon to manage in this one.

We may here adduce the testimony of an inspector of primary schools :—

“ I have always visited the *Providence* of the Curé of Ars with great pleasure. It is true that the good women who conduct the establishment are not highly-educated ; but they have something that supplies for knowledge, and is of much more value—virtue. I have never seen them without being edified at their simplicity, modesty, disinterestedness, and the sincerity of their piety. The children they train are like them. On leaving this house they cannot but become excellent mothers of families. I cannot express the profound impression that I have carried away at each of my visits to Ars. On seeing this poor room with its rough wooden benches, on which were seated some sixty or eighty poor girls who had been brought there by the charity of a single man,

to learn to know God, to pray and work, I thought with great consolation that if there is much that is bad in the world, there is also a great deal of good."

All those externals which in our day are usually regarded as essential were entirely dispensed with. The ways of Providence are apt to differ somewhat from the official methods. There was no uniform dress; the girls wore just what they had arrived in. Nor was there any ostentation. The thought of the *one thing necessary* was intensified by contempt of vain superfluities, and by an utter disregard of all that pertains to the comfortable side of life. They ate black bread and slept on straw; everything was done simply and poorly, without any attempt at elegance or the *recherché*. The whole was so different from the spirit of the world and so conformed to the spirit of holy poverty, that the seraphic St. Francis himself, wedded as he was to this virtue in all its fullness, would not have disdained to accept the *Providence* of Ars as his well-beloved daughter.

The horror of luxury was carried so far that M. Vianney, noticing that the case of the clock was painted with one of the coarse pictures common in our country-districts, painted over, and with his own hands, such an inappropriate ornament to a house dedicated to poverty. The little garden hard by had been tastefully laid out by the previous tenant. It had flower-beds and was garnished with fruit-trees. As long as the Curé saw nothing that might appeal to eye or hand he let things remain as they were; but at the slightest danger of temptation, he had the trees cut down, and re-planted the garden with the homely and necessary vegetables.

The favourite virtue of the servant of God thus imprinted on his work was plain to see. One can hardly imagine the lengths to which the spirit of detachment from earthly things, indifference to human assistance, and entire abandonment to the divine omnipotence, carried both mistresses and pupils. They wished for no other patron than God; nor did they desire any other friend. It is a matter of common knowledge how they drew down His mercy and almost compelled Him to come to the assistance of the works undertaken for love of Him. This confidence was illimitable, blind, infantine; it inspired all, and took the place of all besides. A reply of one of the directresses will illustrate this better than anything we could add. Asked by a friend of the house how many orphans they had at the moment, she replied, quite frankly, that *they did not know*. "Do you really mean to say you do not know?" "Yes, we do: God knows, and that is enough for us." Stupefaction of the lady-visitor; who could not understand neglect of statistics pushed to this extent! "But, suppose one of your girls were to run away . . .?" "Oh! we know them too well individually, and are too much wrapped-up in them, not to notice it at once."

But if at the *Providence* of Ars little account was made of learned theories of modern pedagogy, and that medley of ideas on the subject of education which the world calls progress was entirely by the way, compensation was made by the following of the evangelical counsels and the gladdening of the divine Heart by the practice of virtue. To quote Catherine again :—

“It does one good to see the piety of these poor children and the delight with which they greet the arrival of M. le Curé, who, in his leisure moments, comes to *talk about the good God*. Then they are all eyes and ears—often in tears, too; and many meritorious resolutions are the result of these conferences.

“Sundays and Thursdays are consecrated to the work of reparation. On these days the girls take turns to spend an hour before the Blessed Sacrament, *pour faire amende honorable à Notre Seigneur*. When they hear of any scandal or that the Holy Name of God has been grievously and publicly outraged, the elder ones, who are the most fervent, ask leave to pass the night in prayer, relieving one another every hour, so that the nocturnal adoration may be uninterrupted. Besides which they practise mortification of the senses, as if they belonged to a convent of the strict observance. To sum up: everyone in this house is happy, because everything is done to edification.”

Several of these poor girls died in these admirable dispositions. One of them, who before her illness had a constant terror of death, said to her mistress the day before she passed to a better life: “I am suffering much in body, but I am quite happy . . . I never thought it was so good to die . . . Oh! what happiness there is in one’s religion.” She asked them to sing a hymn; sang it with them, and died singing.

One of the foundresses, Benoîte Lardet, also died a most exemplary death. She had insisted on hearing from the doctor himself how her illness was likely to end. When told that it must end fatally she cried, joyfully: “Oh! how delightful; I am going to see the good God!” A day or two before she passed away her sister came to see her, and learning that her condition was hopeless, burst into tears. “It is very kind of you to grieve so,” said Benoîte, “but would you keep me in this world? I cannot get accustomed to it.” Shortly afterwards her wish was fulfilled, for, having glorified Jesus Christ in the service of His poor, she died the death she had so ardently desired.

The *Providence* will be connected for all time with the catechisms which for more than thirty years fascinated everybody and contributed in some degree to the reputation of the Curé of Ars. In the first instance they were given for the instruction of his orphans; later they were attended by pilgrims from France, Germany, Belgium, England and elsewhere.

Every day at the *Angelus*, after the community dinner, when the single room which did duty for schoolroom, workroom and

refectory, had been swept, M. Vianney arrived, and seating himself on the edge of the table, his little auditory ranged themselves round him, and he talked for an hour.

The principal object of these familiar discourses—outside instruction in the elementary truths of faith—was to inspire the children with a lively horror of sin and fear of the judgments of God. In the dogma of the austere catechist demons had a large place ; to them he, like the doctors of the Church, attributed a prominent part in the ills which afflict mankind. Nor did he hesitate to retail the most terrifying stories borrowed from ancient legends, in such sort as sometimes to frighten his juvenile listeners.

Day by day an increasing number of strangers came to join the regular company. They all listened to these novel instructions with respectful attention, the keenest satisfaction and abundant spiritual profit. It was a species of eloquence entirely of its own ; one that appealed to their intelligence and passed straight through to the heart. The Curé's explanations of the Gospels and their parables, together with his comparisons and unique method of presenting them, rendered the whole acceptable to the most intellectual, and at the same time suitable to the most simple. It is exceedingly difficult to express the truths inculcated by the Curé of Ars accurately in writing ; partly because they were of an unusually high order of thought and partly because his manner differed so entirely from the ordinary manners of thought and speech. One always quitted these conferences with a heart full and softened, and a firm resolution to return on the morrow to hear more.

It is to Catherine that we are indebted for the précis of a series of catechisms at the *Providence*. We imagine our readers will be pleased that some few crumbs from this table of holy poverty should have been gathered up and preserved.

CHAPTER XIX

THE CATECHISMS AT THE PROVIDENCE

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not in loftiness of speech or of wisdom . . . and my speech and my preaching was not in the persuasive words of human wisdom. . . . That your faith might not stand on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. (I. Cor., ii., 1-3-5.)

The words of the priest should be simple, pure, clear, full of sweetness and grace. (St. Isidore, Book II.)

THE instructions of the Curé of Ars were, for the most part, on the happiness of serving God, the beauty of holiness, the unseemliness of even the smallest faults, the avoidance of dangerous occasions, frequentation of the sacraments, prayer, the dignity of the soul, the nothingness of the things of this world, respect for, and love of, our neighbour, and compassion towards the poor. He catechised people of all ages under the appearance of addressing himself to children.

IMPURITY

One vice in particular had wrought the unhappiness of several of these poor children in the past, and bade fair to be their danger in the future ; and he strove to inspire them with a lively horror of it :—

“ To understand how horrible and detestable is the vice which the devils tempt us to commit, but do not commit themselves, we must try to understand what a Christian is A Christian created to the image of God, redeemed by the blood of a God ! A Christian, the child of a God, the brother of a God, the heir of a God ! A Christian, the object of the love of the Three Divine Persons ! A Christian, whose body is the tabernacle of the Holy Ghost : that is what is dishonoured by sin ! . . .

“ We were created to reign one day in heaven above, and if we commit this sin we become the abode of demons. Our Lord has said that nothing impure shall enter into His kingdom. And indeed, how can we expect a soul that has wallowed in this mire to be seen in the presence of God, so pure and so holy ?

“ There are souls which are so hardened, so corrupt, that they wallow in their infection, without perceiving it and without being able to rid themselves of it. Everything tends to evil ; all things recall it—even the holiest. They have these abominable things always before their mind’s eye, like the unclean animal which is inured to filth, pleased with it, rolls in it, sleeps in it, and *grunts from the mud* Such people are objects of horror in the eyes of God and His holy angels.

“ See, my children ! Our Lord was crowned with thorns to

expiate our sins of pride ; but for this accursed sin He was scourged and torn in pieces—for He Himself said that after His flagellation one could count all His bones. Oh ! my children, if it were not that there are some pure souls to make amends to the good God and disarm His justice, you would see how we should be punished ! . . . for now this crime is so common in the world that it makes one shudder. One may say, my children, that hell is vomiting out its abominations on to the earth, as the funnels of a steamer vomit forth smoke. The devil does all he can to soil our soul ; and nevertheless our soul is our all . . . our body is nothing but a mass of putrescence—go to the cemetery, you who love your body and see what it is you love !

“ As I have often told you, there is nothing so hideous as an impure soul. There was once a saint who asked the good God to show him one. He saw this poor soul, and it was like a dead animal that had been dragged through the streets for a week in a hot sun.

“ Those who have lost their purity are like a piece of cloth soaked in oil ; wash it as you will, dry it as you will, the stain always reappears ; in the same manner it needs a miracle to cleanse the impure soul.”

PURITY

To this energetic protestation against vice he was accustomed to oppose the prerogatives of a pure soul. The two subjects are set off by contrast :—

“ There is nothing so beautiful as a pure soul . . . If we understood it we could never lose our purity . . . The pure soul is disengaged from matter, from things of earth, and from itself . . . That is why the saints afflicted their body ; that is why they did not allow it even what was necessary, nor to rise five minutes later, nor to be as warm as it liked, to eat what was nice . . . There ! what the body loses the soul gains ; and what the body takes is lost to the soul.

“ Purity is a gift from heaven ; it must be asked of God. If we ask we shall obtain. You must close your heart against pride, sensuality and all other passions . . . just as one shuts doors and windows, so that none may enter.

“ What joy for a guardian angel to have charge of a pure soul ! My children, when a soul is pure, all heaven loves it ! . . .

“ Pure souls will form a circle round our Lord. The purer we have been on earth, the nearer we shall be to Him in heaven.

“ When the heart is pure it cannot but love, because it has discovered the source of love, which is God. Blessed are the pure in heart, says our Lord, for they shall see God.

“ My children, one cannot understand the power of a pure soul with God. It is not that soul that does the will of God ; rather, it is God who does the will of that soul ! Look at Moses—that

pure soul. When God would have punished the Jewish people, He said to him : ' Do not pray to me, that my wrath may be kindled against them.' Nevertheless, Moses prayed, and God spared His people. He allowed Himself to be persuaded ; He could not withstand the prayers of this pure soul. Oh ! my children, a soul that has never been sullied by this miserable sin obtains whatever it will from the good God.

" To preserve purity three things are necessary : the presence of God, prayer, and the sacraments. Besides these there is the reading of the Lives of the Saints ; that nourishes the soul.

" How beautiful is a soul ! Our Lord let St. Catherine see one ; she found it so beautiful that she said : ' Lord, if I did not know there is only one God, I should have taken this for one.' The image of God is reflected in a pure soul, as the image of the sun in water.

" A pure soul is the admiration of the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. The Father contemplates His own work : There is the creature that I made . . . The Son regards the price of His Blood. One understands the worth of an object by the price paid for it . . . The Holy Ghost lives in it, as in a temple.

" We learn still more concerning the value of a soul from the efforts the devil makes to bring about its loss. Hell is leagued against it ; heaven is banded together in its favour . . . Oh ! how grand that is !

" To gain some idea of our dignity we must frequently recall heaven, Calvary and hell. If we understood what it is to be a child of God, we could not do wrong, we should be like angels on earth. To be children of God ! Oh ! what a dignity . . . It is a wonderful thing to have a heart ; and, small as it is, to be able to love God with it. How shameful it is for man to fall so low—he whom God has placed so high.

" When the angels rebelled against God, this God, so good, seeing that they could no longer enjoy the happiness for which He had created them, made man and this little world that we see to nourish his body. But he must also nourish his soul ; and as nothing created can nourish a soul, which is a spirit, God would give Himself for its nourishment.

" But the great misfortune is that people neglect to have recourse to this heavenly nourishment as they wander through the desert of life. Just like a person who dies of hunger beside a well-spread table, so there are some who remain fifty or sixty years without feeding their soul.

" Oh ! that Christians could understand the words of our Lord, who says to them : ' In spite of thy wretchedness, I wish to have near me that beautiful soul which I created for myself. I made it so great that it is only I myself who can fill it. I made it so pure that only my Body can serve for its nourishment.'

" Our Lord has always favoured pure souls. St. John, the

beloved disciple, reclined on His bosom . . . St. Catherine was a pure soul ; she often walked in paradise. When she died the angels took her body and carried it to Mount Sinai—where Moses received the Ten Commandments. By this prodigy God showed that a pure soul is so pleasing to Him as to deserve that even the body which has participated in its purity should be buried by angels.

“ God looks with love upon a pure soul ; He grants all it asks. How could He resist the petitions of a soul that only lives for Him, by Him, in Him ? She seeks Him, and God shows Himself to her ; she calls, and God comes ; she is one with Him ; she constrains His will. A pure soul is all powerful with the loving heart of our Lord.

“ A pure soul is as near to God as an infant is to its mother. It caresses her, embraces her ; and the mother returns its caresses and embraces.”

PRIDE

One of the passions against which the Curé of Ars inveighed most frequently was pride ; and he spoke of it as one who knows the human heart :—

“ Pride is the accursed sin which drove the angels from paradise and precipitated them into hell. This sin is as old as the world itself.

“ See, my children, one sins by pride in many ways. A person may take pride in his clothes, his language, his bearing, and even in his manner of walking. There are many who, even in the streets, walk haughtily and seem to say to all who see them : ‘ Look at me ; what a fine fellow I am ! I hold myself as straight as a dart ! and don’t I walk well ! ’ Others there are who, when they have done something well, are never done telling about it ; and if the story miscarries make themselves miserable by thinking people have only a poor opinion of them. . . . Other some are quite ashamed that their friends should see them in company of the poor—they always seek the society of the well-to-do. If by chance they are admitted into the houses of their betters they boast of it and give way to vanity. Then there are people who are proud of their tongue. Before they enter the presence of the rich they think over what to say and prepare it carefully ; if they use a wrong expression they are covered with shame, because they think others are laughing at them. But, my children, with the humble it is not so . . . Whether they are laughed at or whether they are respected, praised or blamed, honoured or despised, receive much attention or none at all—it is all the same to them.

“ My children, there are also people who give large alms in order that they may be esteemed ; these gather no fruit at all from their good works. On the contrary, their alms become the occasions of sin.

"We mix pride with everything—like salt. We like to see our good works appreciated. If anyone notices our virtues, how pleased we are! If our defects are exposed, we are cast down. I have seen this in many persons; if one ventures to find fault with them they are troubled, upset. The saints were not like that; it was pain for them if their virtues were known, and joy when their imperfections were remarked.

"My children, a proud person thinks everything he does is well done; he would rule everyone he has to do with; he is always right, always thinks his opinion better than that of others . . . *It is not so!* A humble and well-informed person, if his opinion be asked, gives it quite simply; and then allows others to give their own. Be they right, or be they wrong, he says no more."

SIN

Sin, its hideousness and lamentable consequences, was the constant subject of his discourses:—

"See, my children, how sin degrades man. From an angel, created to love God, he becomes a demon who will curse Him for all eternity . . . Ah! if our first parent, Adam, had not sinned; and if we did not sin every day how happy should we be! We should be as happy as the saints in heaven. There would be no more misfortune in the world. Oh! how lovely it would be!

"In practice, my children, it is sin that draws down upon us all calamities, plagues, war, pestilence, famine, earthquakes, fire, frost, hail, storms—all that afflicts us: everything that makes us unhappy.

"See, my children, one who is in a state of sin is always sad, labours without result, is wearied and disgusted with everything . . . while he who is at peace with God is ever joyous and contented. . . How happy to live like that! . . . and how beautiful to die like that! . . .

"My children, we are afraid of death . . . I know it well! It is sin that makes us afraid to die; it is sin that makes death terrible, insupportable; it is sin that affrights the wicked at the hour of his awful passage to eternity. Alas, my God! there is good reason to be terrified . . . To think that one is accursed—accursed of God! . . . that is enough to make one tremble. Accursed of God—and why? Why do men run the risk of being accursed of God? . . . For a blasphemy, a bad thought, a bottle of wine, for two minutes' pleasure! For two minutes' pleasure, to lose God, his own soul, heaven—and for all time! We shall behold father, mother, sister, our neighbour—all who were near and dear to us—with whom we have lived, but whose example we have not followed; we shall see them ascend body and soul to heaven, while we shall go down body and soul into hell, there to be burned. All the devils whose counsels we have heeded will be there to torment us . . .

“ My children, if you were to see a man preparing a huge stack of wood, heaping faggot upon faggot ; and asked him what he was about ; and he were to reply : ‘ I am getting a fire ready for myself,’ what would you think of him ? And if you saw this same man go up to the wood-pile and, when it was alight, cast himself headlong into it . . . what would you say ? And that is what we do when we commit sin. It is not God who plunges us into hell ; it is ourselves who do it—by our sins. The lost will say : ‘ I have lost my own soul, heaven, God, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault ! ’ A lost soul will rise above the fire, only to fall back into it . . . He will always feel the need of rising, because he was created for God, the great, the highest of beings, the Most High . . . just as a bird confined in a room flies upwards to the ceiling and falls down . . . the justice of God is the ceiling against which the lost fly.

“ There is no necessity to prove the existence of hell. Our Saviour Himself spoke of it, when he told the story of the wicked rich man who cried : ‘ Lazarus ! Lazarus ! ’ We know very well there is a hell, but we live as though there were not : we sell our souls for a few coins. We put off our conversion to the hour of death ; but who can guarantee that we shall have time and strength in that fateful moment, which all the saints have dreaded ; in which all hell will unite for a last assault on us—knowing it to be the decisive one ? Many there are who, having lost their faith, will only believe in hell when they enter it. One administers the sacraments to them ; but, to the question as to whether they have committed such and such a sin, they will reply : ‘ Oh ! I can’t be bothered about that ! ’ . . .

“ And some there are who offend the good God every minute of their life. Their heart is nothing but a nest of sins ; they are like a piece of meat gone bad, honeycombed with worms.

“ No, verily, if sinners thought of eternity, of those terrible words, FOR EVER . . . they would be converted on the spot . . . Cain has been nearly six thousand years in hell, and he has only just entered upon it.”

THE SACRAMENTS

M. Vianney spoke of the Sacraments with an inexhaustible abundance of heart :—

“ My children, why are there no Sacraments in other religions ? It is because there is no salvation in them. We are of the religion in which one saves his soul, we have the Sacraments at our disposal. We should be grateful to God for it, for the Sacraments are the source of salvation.

“ My children, if we understood the value of Holy Communion we should avoid even the smallest faults, in order to have the happiness of approaching oftener. We should keep our soul ever pure in the sight of God. Now, my children, I suppose you are

all going to confession to-day ; you will watch over yourselves ; you will be happy in the thought that to-morrow the blessing of receiving the good God into your heart will be yours . . . To-morrow you cannot offend God either : your soul will be fragrant with the Precious Blood of our Lord . . . Oh ! happy existence ! ”

HOLY COMMUNION

When once he had commenced to talk of the adorable Sacrament, the object of his seraphic ardour, the holy Curé could not restrain himself :—

“ Oh ! my children, how beautiful will the soul be for all eternity that has often and worthily received the good God ! The Body of our Lord will shine through our body ; His adorable Blood will flow in our own ; our soul will be united with His through all eternity . . . It is then that it will enjoy pure and perfect happiness ! . . . My children, when the soul of a Christian who has received our Lord enters paradise it will add a new joy to heaven. For angels and the Queen of angels will approach it, because they recognise the Son of God in that soul. Then it will be that that soul will be rewarded for all the sufferings and sacrifices it has endured during its life.

“ My children, one knows very well when the soul has received the Sacrament of the Eucharist worthily. It is so drowned in love, penetrated with it, and changed by it, that it cannot recognise itself any longer in its words and actions . . . It is humble, it is gentle, it is mortified, charitable, and modest—it is at peace with all the world. It is a soul capable of the greatest sacrifices. Thus it is no longer recognisable.”

HOLY MASS.—FREQUENT COMMUNION

He often held forth on the benefits of assisting at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and on the joys of frequent Communion :—

“ All good works put together are not equal to the Sacrifice of the Mass, because they are the works of man, and the holy Mass is the work of God. Martyrdom is nothing by comparison ; it is the sacrifice of his life that man makes to God ; Mass is the Sacrifice of His Body and Blood that God makes for man. Oh ! how great is the priest ! If he understood what he does, as he should understand it, he would die . . . God obeys him ; the priest says the words, and our Lord descends from heaven at his call, and confines Himself within the limits of a tiny host. God looks at the altar. ‘ There is my beloved Son,’ says He, ‘ in whom I am well pleased.’ He can refuse nothing to the offering of this Victim.

“ If one had but the faith one would see God hidden in the priest like a light behind a glass, like wine mingled with water.

“ We should try to deserve to receive our Lord every day. If we cannot make a sacramental Communion, let us make up for

it by a spiritual Communion, which we can do at any hour of the day ; for we ought always to have an earnest desire to receive the good God. Communion is to the soul what the stroke of a bellows is to a fire which is beginning to go out, but in which there is still some life ; one blows and the flame springs up. After the reception of the sacraments, when we feel the love of God diminishing ; quick ! make a spiritual Communion . . . When we are able to come to the church, let us turn towards the tabernacle—there are no walls for the good God—and say five *Paters* and five *Aves* for a spiritual Communion . . . We cannot receive the good God more than once a day ; a soul aflame with love can supply for that by the desire to receive Him at any moment.

“ O Man, how exalted art thou ! . . . who hast for food and drink the Body and Blood of a God ! Oh ! how sweet a life is this life of union with the good God ! It is heaven upon earth : no longer any pain, no longer any Cross ! When you have the happiness to receive the good God, you feel joy and consolation in your heart for a few moments ! . . . It is always thus with pure souls ; and in that union they find their happiness and their strength.”

THE REAL PRESENCE

Sometimes M. Vianney addressed his auditors on the sweetness of the Real Presence :—

“ It is our Lord who is hidden there, waiting for us to come to visit Him, and lay our wants before Him. How good He is ! He accommodates Himself to our weakness . . . In heaven, where we shall be glorious and triumphant, we shall see Him in all His glory ; were He to show Himself in this glory before us now, we should not dare to approach Him ; but He hides Himself like a person in prison, and says to us : ‘ You do not see me, but that matters not ; ask of me what you will, and I will grant it.’ He is there in the Sacrament of His love, who sighs and prays without cessation to His Father, on behalf of sinners. How grateful to Him is the little quarter-of-an-hour we take from our occupations, our useless pursuits, to come to pray to Him, visit and console Him for all the outrages He receives ! When He beholds pure souls in His presence He smiles upon them . . .

“ He is there as a Victim also . . . think well upon that ! A prayer most agreeable to God is to ask the Blessed Virgin to offer her eternal, her divine Son, all bleeding and torn, to the Father, for the conversion of sinners : it is the best prayer that can be made, seeing that then all petitions are made in the name and through the merits of Jesus Christ.

“ When we are before the Blessed Sacrament, instead of looking about let us close our eyes and lips ; let us open our heart, and the good God will open His. We shall go to Him and He will come to us, the one to ask and the other to receive ; it will be as

a mutual exchange between the two. Such sweetness should make us forget ourselves in seeking God! The saints lost sight of themselves that they might see nothing but God; laboured only for Him; forgot all created things that they might remember Him alone; thus it is that heaven opens to us."

THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

At other times the Curé of Ars would recall the benefits of the Sacrament of Penance and enter into practical details:—

"My children, when we have a slight stain on our soul, we should do as a person does who has a beautiful crystal globe which he watches over with the most scrupulous care. If he finds a speck of dust on it he passes a sponge over it as soon as he perceives it. Thus the globe becomes bright and clear once more. In the same manner, when you have a slight stain on your soul reverently take holy water; perform one of those good works which carry with them the remission of venial sin—an alms, a genuflexion before the Blessed Sacrament, attendance at Mass . . .

"My children, it is like one who has a trifling indisposition—he has no need of a doctor; he can cure himself. If he has a headache, he goes to bed . . . if he is hungry, he has only to eat. But if it is a grave matter, a doctor must be called in, and after the doctor comes medicine . . . When one has fallen into some grave sin, recourse must be had to the doctor, who is the priest, and to the remedies, which are the sacraments.

"My children, we cannot understand the goodness of God in our behalf in the institution of this great Sacrament. Had we a grace to ask of our Lord, it would never have occurred to us to ask that. But He has foreseen our weakness and our inconstancy in good, and His love has led Him to give us something we should never have dared to ask ourselves."

TEMPERANCE

M. Vianney recommended Temperance, and gave advice on the practice of mortification suggested by a ripe experience:—

"The third cardinal virtue is Temperance, which is to control the imagination, and not to allow it to run away with us; to control the eyes; to control the mouth—there are some who always have something nice in it; to control the ears, and not permit them to hear useless songs and conversation; to control the nose—there are people who perfume themselves to such a degree as to cause qualms in those around them; to control the hands—some are for ever washing them in hot water, and always seek to handle things pleasing to the touch . . . in fine, to control the whole body, *that poor machine*, and not let it go like a runaway horse, without bit or bridle; but to restrain and subdue it. Some there are who have been *lost in bed* . . . who are content to lie awake, so that they can feel its comfort. The saints

were not like that. I don't know how we shall ever find our way to their society . . . But there ! . . . If we are saved, we shall have to remain a long time in purgatory ; while they were taken at once to see the good God in heaven. St. Charles Borromeo, that great Saint, had a magnificent cardinal's bed in his room for everybody to see ; but he had also a bed made of faggots of wood, which nobody saw ; and this was the one he slept in. He never warmed himself ; and his visitors noticed that he always kept where he could not feel the fire. Such were the saints ! They lived for heaven, not for earth ; they were always celestial, and we ? We are always terrestrial. Oh ! how I love those little mortifications which no one sees ; such as to get up a quarter-of-an-hour sooner ; to rise for a short time during the night to pray ; but there are some whose only thought is of sleep.

"There was once a solitary who built himself a royal palace in the trunk of an oak. He lined it with thorns, and hung three stones overhead ; so that when he rose or turned he felt either the thorns or stones, while we only think of soft beds in which to sleep in comfort.

"One can deprive oneself of warmth ; if one find the seat uncomfortable one can stay there without looking for a better one ; if one takes a walk in the garden one can refrain from picking any tempting fruit ; at meal-times one can go without some small thing that is on the table ; one can restrain the eyes from looking at pleasing things, especially in the streets of large towns . . . But there are some heads which are always in motion, some eyes that are ever all around them . . . When we pass through the streets let us fix our gaze on our Saviour bearing His Cross before us ; on the Blessed Virgin, who beholds us ; on our angel guardian, who is at our side. How beautiful is this interior life ! It leads to union with the good God . . . But when the devil sees a soul striving to attain to it he endeavours to distract it by filling the imagination with a thousand fancies. The good Christian heeds him not ; he goes ever forward to perfection, like a fish that plunges to the bottom of the sea . . . As for us, alas ! we drag ourselves along like a leech in the mud.

"There were saints in the desert who were clothed with thorns ; and we only seek to be comfortable ! We want to go to heaven, but comfortably, without any self-denial at all—that is not how the saints got there. They sought to mortify themselves in every way, and felt the greatest delight in all their privations. How happy are they who love the good God ! They never let slip an opportunity of doing good ; the avaricious seize every chance to increase their treasures ; the saints do the same in regard to heavenly treasures, and they go on ever increasing them . . . It will be a great surprise at the Day of Judgment to see souls so rich !"

THE NOTHINGNESS OF LIFE

The holy catechist never failed to instruct his juvenile audience concerning the Nothingness of Life. Thus, on the vigil of Ash-Wednesday :—

“ My children, to-morrow the Church will say to us something well calculated to humiliate us. Reflect seriously on these words : ‘ Remember, O man, that thou art dust.’ I shall say it to myself, and I shall say it to you as well.

“ Behold man then, man who labours hard, who frets, who makes a great fuss, who would like to dominate everything, who thinks himself somebody, who seems to want to say to the sun itself : ‘ Take yourself off, and let me light up the world in your place !’ Some day, this proud man will be reduced to, at most, a pinch of dust that will be carried from bank to bank, *de Saône en Saône*, till it gets to the sea.

“ My children, I often think we are like those tiny grains of sand that the wind picks up in its onward path ; they are whirled round for a second, and vanish the second after . . .

“ See ! we had brothers and sisters, and they are dead—some of them. Well then ! they are reduced to that little handful of dust, of which I spoke just now.”

PRAYER

“ See, my children, a Christian’s treasure is not on earth, it is in heaven. Well then, our thoughts should be where our treasure is.

“ Man has a beautiful function, that of prayer and love. You pray, you love ; that is the happiness of man on earth.

“ Prayer is nothing but union with God. When the heart is pure and united with God it is consoled and feels a sweetness that draws it heavenward, a light that dazzles. In this intimate union God and the soul are like two morsels of wax moulded into one ; they cannot be separated. It is a very wonderful thing, this union of God with His insignificant creature ; a happiness passing all understanding.

“ We have deserved to be left unable to pray ; but God in His goodness has permitted us to speak to Him. Our prayer is an incense that He will accept with pleasure.

“ My children, your heart is but small ; but prayer enlarges it and renders it capable of loving God . . . Prayer is a foretaste of heaven, an overflowing of paradise. Prayer never leaves us without sweetness. It is honey that descends into the soul and sweetens everything. Troubles vanish in the presence of a prayer well made, like snow under the rays of the sun.

“ Prayer makes time seem to pass quickly, and so pleasantly that one fails to notice how long it is. There are those who lose themselves in prayer, like a fish in water, because they are absorbed in God. In their heart there is no betwixt and between. Oh !

how I love those generous souls ! St. Francis of Assisi and St. Colette saw our Lord, and spoke to Him as we speak to one another. As for ourselves : how often do we come to church without thinking what we are going to do there ; or what we are going to ask for ! And yet, when we go to call upon someone we have no difficulty in remembering why it was we came . . . Some appear as if they were about to say to the good God : ‘ I am just going to say a word or two, so as to be able to get away quickly. . . . ’ I often think that when we come to adore our Lord we should get all we ask if we asked for it with a lively faith and a pure heart. But there it is, you see . . . we are without faith, without hope, without desire, and without love.

* * * * *

“ Man has two voices—one of an angel, the other of the beast. The cry of the angel is prayer ; the cry of the beast is sin. . . Those who do not pray at all stoop to earth, like a mole trying to make a hole in which to hide itself. They are of the earth, earthy, materialised, and think only of temporal things . . . like that miser to whom the Sacraments were administered one day ; when a silver crucifix was presented to him to kiss, he remarked : ‘ That cross weighs at least ten ounces.’ ”

“ In heaven if a day were to pass without adoration it would be heaven no longer ; and if the poor lost ones could only adore, despite their sufferings, hell would no more be hell. Alas ! they had a heart to love Him with and a tongue with which to bless Him ; they were created for that end . . . And now they are condemned to curse Him for ever and ever. Had they a hope of being able to pray but once, and that only for a minute ; they would await that minute with eagerness, for it would assuage their torments.”

On occasions it happened that M. Vianney, in speaking of prayer, would make this beautiful paraphrase of the Lord’s Prayer :—

“ OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN . . . Oh ! how beautiful it is, my children, to have a Father in heaven ! . . . THY KINGDOM COME. . . . If I allow the good God to reign in my heart, He will take me to reign with Him in glory. . . THY WILL BE DONE . . . There is nothing so sweet as to do the will of God, and nothing so perfect . . . To do things well we must do them as He would have them done, and in all submission to His designs . . . GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD . . . We have two parts—soul and body. We ask the good God to feed our poor *carcase* ; and He answers by causing the ground to produce all that is required for our subsistence . . . But we also ask Him to nourish our soul, which is the most beautiful part of us ; and earth is too small to furnish what is necessary to satisfy it ; the soul hungers after God, and He alone can fill it. So the good God did not think it too

much to live on earth and assume a body, to the end that this body might become the food of our souls : ' My flesh is meat indeed,' said our Lord. . . ' The bread that I will give you is my flesh for the life of the world.' The bread of souls is in the tabernacle. When the priest takes the Host and shows it to you your soul should exclaim : ' Behold my food !' . . . Oh ! my children, we are too highly favoured ! . . . We shall never understand it on this side of heaven ; that is the pity of it ! . . ." (These last words were drowned in tears).

THE PRIEST

M. Vianney loved to speak of the eminent dignity of the priesthood :—

" My children, we now come to the Sacrament of Holy Orders. It is a Sacrament that does not appear to concern any one of you, and yet it affects everyone. This Sacrament raises man to the state of God. What is a priest ? A man who holds the place of God. ' Go,' says our Lord to the priest, ' as the Father has sent me, I send you. . . All power is given to me in heaven and on earth. Go then, teach all nations. . . ' When the priest forgives sins he does not say : ' May God absolve thee ' ; he says : ' I absolve thee.' At the consecration he does not say : ' This is the Body of our Lord.' He says : ' This is my Body.'

" St. Bernard tells us that everything comes to us through Mary ; one could say in like manner that everything comes to us through the priest ; yes, all blessings, all graces, all the gifts of heaven . . .

" If we had no Sacrament of Holy Orders we should not have our Lord. Who is it that has placed Him in the tabernacle there ? The priest. Who was it that received your soul when you came into the world ? The priest. Who feeds it, to give it strength for its pilgrimage through life ? The priest. Who will prepare it to appear before God, by cleansing it for the last time in the Blood of Jesus Christ ? The priest—always the priest. And if this soul should die, who will bring it back to life, and restore its peace and tranquillity ? Once more, the priest. You cannot recall a single one of God's benefits without recalling the person of the priest at the same time.

" If you confess your sins to the Blessed Virgin, or to an angel, will they absolve you ? No. Will they give you the Body and Blood of our Lord ? No. Our Blessed Lady cannot cause her divine Son to descend upon the altar. Though you had two hundred angels there they could not absolve you. A priest, simple as he may be, can do it ; he can say to you : ' Go in peace ; I forgive you.' Oh ! how exalted is the priest !

" The priest will only understand his state in heaven . . . did he understand it on earth, he would die—not from fear, but from love.

"The other gifts of God will avail you nothing without the priest. Of what use a house full of gold if there is nobody to open the door for you? The priest holds the key to celestial treasures; he it is that opens the door; he is the steward of the good God, the administrator of His goods.

"Without the priest, the Passion and Death of our Lord would have been to no purpose. Think of the heathen. What is it to them that our Lord died? Alas! they can have no share in the benefits of the Redemption, as long as they have no priests to apply His Blood to them.

"The priest is not a priest for his own sake; he does not absolve himself nor administer the sacraments to himself. He is not for himself, he is for you.

"Next to God, the priest is everything . . . leave a parish twenty years without a priest; they will be worshipping the beasts of the field there.

"Were M. le Missionaire and I to go away you would say: 'What are we to do in the church? There is no longer any Mass; our Lord is no more there; just as well say our prayers at home . . .'

"When they want to destroy religion they begin by attacking the priest, because where there is no priest there is no Sacrifice; and when there is no Sacrifice there is no religion.

"When the bell summons you to church, if anyone were to ask you: 'Where are you going?' you might reply: 'I am going to feed my soul.' Were someone to point to the tabernacle, and ask: 'What is inside that gilded door?' 'It is the store-room of my soul.' Who is it that has the key, provides the viands, prepares the feast and waits at table? It is the priest. And the food? It is the precious Body and Blood of our Lord . . . O my God! my God! how much you have loved us! . . ."

And the holy Curé interrupted his discourse to weep . . . then he resumed:—

"See the power of the priest! Of a particle of bread the priest makes a God! It is more than the creation of the world . . . Someone asked: 'Does St. Philomena obey the Curé of Ars, then?' Certainly she does; and she may well do so, since God obeys him.

"If I were to meet a priest and an angel I should salute the priest before I saluted the angel. The angel is the friend of God, but the priest holds His place . . . St. Teresa kissed the ground on which a priest had walked . . . When you see a priest you should say: 'There is he who made me a child of God, and opened heaven to me by Holy Baptism, who has cleansed me from my sins, who gives me food for my soul . . .'. At the sight of a church-steeple you can say: 'What is there? The Body of our Lord. How did it come there? Because a priest has been there and said Mass.'

"What joy was there among the Apostles after the Resurrection of our Lord, on seeing the Master they had loved so well!

The priest should have the same joy when he sees our Lord, whom he holds in his hands . . . We attach great value to things that have lain in the dish of the Blessed Virgin and the Infant Jesus, at Loreto. But the fingers of the priest, which have touched the adorable Flesh of Jesus Christ, and been dipped in the chalice in which His Blood has been, in the ciborium which has contained His Body, are they not still more precious?

"The priesthood represents the love of the Heart of Jesus. When you see a priest think of our Lord Jesus Christ."

M. Vianney delighted to end his catechism by some striking and practical thought. It was as an arrow fired into the soul of his hearers.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

This was another of the subjects on which the Curé of Ars discoursed with predilection; and one on which one might say he was inspired in a very high degree:—"Oh! how beautiful it all is, my children! The Father is our Creator, the Son is our Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit is our Conductor.

"Left to himself, man is nothing; but with the Holy Spirit he can do everything. Man is earthly and animal, and only the Holy Spirit can raise his soul and bear it on high. Why were the saints so detached from the things of this world? Because they allowed themselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit. Those who are guided by the Holy Spirit see things aright. That is why so many ignorant people know much more than the wise.

"When we are guided by a God of light and power, we cannot fall into error. The Holy Spirit is both a light and a power. It is He who enables us to distinguish between true and false, between good and bad. Just as a telescope enlarges objects, so the Holy Spirit causes us to see good and evil enlarged. With the aid of the Holy Spirit we see everything as under a magnifying glass; we see the greatness of the least action done for God, and the magnitude of the smallest fault.

"As a watchmaker with his eye-glass distinguishes the tiniest movements of a watch, so with the light of the Holy Spirit we can discern our poor life in all its details. Then the least imperfections appear very gross; the smallest sin an object of horror. That is why the Blessed Virgin never sinned. The Holy Spirit made her understand the hideous character of sin. She was affrighted at the smallest fault.

"Those who have the Holy Spirit with them see no good in themselves—so well do they appreciate their own wretchedness. The proud are those to whom the Holy Spirit never comes.

"Worldly people have not the Holy Spirit in them; or, if they have, it is only for the moment; He dwells not with them, the clamour of the world drives Him away. A Christian, led by the Holy Spirit, has no manner of difficulty in parting with the

good things of this life in order to be free to seek those of the life to come. He understands the disparity.

"The worldly eye sees no further than this life ; just as my own can see nothing beyond that wall when the church-door is closed. The Christian eye beholds the depths of eternity. To the man who submits to be led by the Holy Spirit the world seems to have no existence ; to the man of the world God seems to have no existence. The question is then, who is it that is to lead us ? If it is not the Holy Spirit, we labour in vain ; there is neither substance nor savour in all that we do. If it is, there is a delightful sweetness . . . a joy surpassing everything else.

"Those who submit to the guidance of the Holy Spirit experience all kinds of interior consolation, while bad Christians find their path rough and thorny.

"The soul that possesses the Holy Spirit never wearies in the presence of God ; his very heart exudes love towards Him.

"Without the Holy Spirit we are like stones upon the road . . . Take a wet sponge in one hand and a pebble in the other and squeeze both equally. You will squeeze nothing out of the pebble, while the sponge will shed water in plenty. The sponge is the soul filled with the Holy Spirit ; the pebble, the heart, cold and hard, in which the Holy Spirit dwelleth not.

"A soul under the influence of the Holy Spirit draws a savour from prayer that makes it feel the time all too short ; it never loses its sense of the sacred presence of God. Such a heart, before our good Saviour in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar, is as a grape in the winepress.

"It is the Holy Spirit who directs the thoughts of the just and inspires their words . . . Those with whom He abides never bring forth evil ; all the fruits of the Holy Spirit are good.

"Without the Holy Spirit all is cold ; so when fervour is felt to be diminishing, we should make a novena to the Holy Spirit, to ask faith and love . . . Notice how, when one has made a retreat or a jubilee, one is full of good desires ; these good desires are the breath of the Holy Spirit, which has passed over our soul and renewed everything therein—like the warm winds that melt the ice and usher in the spring . . . You who are not as yet great saints have moments in which you experience the sweetness of prayer and the presence of God ; these are nought else than visits of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit is with us the heart dilates, bathes in divine love. The fish never complains that there is too much water ; and the good Christian never complains of being too long with the good God. Some there are who find religion wearisome ; it is rather that the Holy Spirit abides not in them.

"If one asked of the lost : 'Why are you in hell ?' they would reply : 'For having resisted the Holy Spirit.' And if you said to the blessed : 'Why are you in heaven ?' the answer would be ;

‘For having listened to the voice of the Holy Spirit.’ . . . When holy thoughts come to us it betokens a visit of the Holy Spirit.

“The Holy Spirit is a power. It was He who sustained St. Simeon on his pillar; it was He who strengthened the martyrs. Without Him the martyrs had fallen like the leaves from the trees. When they set light to the faggots around them, the Holy Spirit quenched the heat of the fire by the flames of divine love.

“The good God, in sending the Holy Spirit to us, has acted towards us like a great king who commits the care of one of his subjects to his minister, with these instructions: ‘You will accompany this man everywhere, and bring him back to me safe and sound.’ How beautiful it is, my children, to have the Holy Spirit for a companion! He is the best of guides . . . And to have to own that there are some who will not follow Him . . .”

Here the Curé of Ars wept. Then:—

“The Holy Spirit is like a man who, having a carriage with a good horse, would drive us to Paris. We have only to say: ‘Yes,’ and get in. It is an easy matter to say ‘Yes’ . . . Well then, the Holy Spirit wishes to lead us to heaven; we have but to say ‘Yes,’ and allow Him to conduct us thither.

“The Holy Spirit is like a gardener who cultivates our soul . . . The Holy Spirit is our servant.

“You have a gun. Good! You load it . . . But it needs someone to apply fire to it and make it go off . . . In the same way we have within us the capability of doing good . . . It is the Holy Spirit who applies the fire, and the good works begin.

“The Holy Spirit reposes in the souls of the just, like a dove in its nest. He broods over the desires of a pure soul, like the dove over her young.

“The Holy Spirit leads us as a mother does her two-years-old child—leads it by the hand . . . as one that sees leads another that is blind.

The sacraments instituted by our Lord would not have saved us without the Holy Spirit. Even the death of our Lord would have been useless without Him. That is why our Lord said to His Apostles: ‘It is good for you that I go away, for, if I go not away, the Comforter will not come to you.’ It was imperative that this harvest of graces should be made fruitful by the coming of the Holy Spirit. Just as in the case of a grain of corn; you put it into the ground; good! But it needs sun and rain, if it is to grow and become an ear.

“We should say every morning: ‘My God, send me Thy Spirit, to make me know what I am, and what Thou art.’”

SUFFERING

The Passion of our Lord was a subject to which the Curé of Ars recurred unceasingly, and with inexhaustible fulness of heart and abundance of tears. He assisted in spirit, and made his

hearers assist, at all the scenes of the *Via Dolorosa* and Calvary. He entered into the minutest details with a marvellous exactness. He seemed to see his crucified Master with his own eyes; he counted His wounds, saw His sacred Blood flow, and wept over His sufferings.

Other saints before him have been vouchsafed this pious sorrow. With God is no past; the Passion of His Son is ever present to Him; and when He deigns to lift the veil that hides the Passion from us we also see it exactly as it happened in Jerusalem.

Love of the Cross, the blessings of suffering was also one of his favourite themes. One thing always struck us—the beautiful association of ideas to which the subject gave rise. The discourse, which commenced by the history of the Passion of our Lord, was completed by the spectacle of the sufferings of the saints, which seemed to be a continuation of the same story.

The Curé of Ars often spoke of his old master, M. Balley, who wore an iron belt round his body and iron bracelets; he was a *fagot* (i.e., skeleton) covered with a soutane, so meagre and wasted was he. He delighted to cite *cette bonne petite sainte Rose* (St. Rose of Lima), who wore a crown ornamented with ninety-nine iron points on her head; to whom our Lord offered the choice of a crown of thorns or a crown of roses; who chose the crown of thorns and slept on a couch of sharp stones and potsherds. He told the story of the saintly queen who exhorted the people to repentance while she was being burned with lighted torches and plunged into a vat of cold water; of St. Lawrence, who, after being roasted on one side asked to be turned over on the other; of St. Tiburtius, who walked on live coals and seemed to be treading on roses; of St. Clement, who was dragged to prisons and scaffolds for a long time; and who rejoiced to die, saying: “Adieu prisons! adieu tortures! adieu poor earth! adieu miserable life! I am going to see my God, never more to be separated from Him.”

Many a time have we seen M. Vianney moved by the following tale:—

“In a parish quite close to this there was a little boy who lay in his bed, very ill and in great pain. I said to him: ‘My poor child, you seem to suffer a great deal.’ He answered: ‘No, Monsieur le Curé, to-day I do not feel yesterday’s pain, and to-morrow I shall not feel the pain of to-day.’ ‘You would like to be cured, eh?’ ‘No: I was a bad boy before I took ill; I might become one again . . .’ That was vinegar indeed, but the oil was stronger than the vinegar here . . . We don’t understand these things, because we are too worldly. The children with whom the Holy Spirit abides put us to shame.

“If the good God sends us crosses we are disheartened, we complain, we murmur. We are so disgusted with all that goes contrary to us that we would like to live in a box lined with

cotton-wool ; a box of thorns is where we ought to be. It is by the Cross that we have to get to heaven. Sickness, temptation and pain are so many crosses to conduct us thither. Very soon there will be an end of all of them.

"The Cross is the ladder to heaven. . . How consoling it is to suffer under the eye of God, and to be able to say, when we make our examination of conscience at night : ' Well, soul of mine, for two or three hours to-day thou hast borne some resemblance to Jesus Christ. Thou hast been scourged, crowned with thorns and crucified with Him ! ' Oh ! what treasure laid up against the hour of death ! How good it is to die, when one has lived on the Cross !

"Willing or unwilling, suffer one must. Some suffer like the good thief, others like the bad one. Both of them suffered equally ; but one knew how to make his sufferings meritorious ; he accepted them in the spirit of reparation, and turning towards the crucified Saviour heard from His lips the beautiful words : ' To-day thou shalt be with me in paradise.' The other, on the contrary, broke into howlings, shrieked imprecations and blasphemies, and died in the most horrible despair.

"There are two ways of suffering ; to suffer with love, and to suffer without it. Because the saints loved they suffered with patience, joy, and perseverance. We suffer ourselves ; but with anger, vexation and weariness, because we do not love. Did we but love God, we should love the Cross, long for it, be pleased with it . . . We should esteem ourselves fortunate in being able to suffer for the love of Him who suffered so willingly for us. Why do we groan under it ? Alas ! the poor heathen, who have not the blessing of knowing God and His infinite love, have the same crosses as we ; but without the same consolations.

"But it is so hard, you say ! No, it is sweet, it is consoling, it is pleasing, it is a happiness ! Only we must love while we suffer, and we must suffer if we love.

"In the way of the Cross, my children, it is only the first step that costs us anything. It is the dread of the Cross that makes our greatest cross . . . We lack the courage to take up our cross ; and thereby make a great mistake : for whatever we do, the Cross will find us out, we cannot escape it. What then have we to lose ? Why do we not love our crosses, and use them to get to heaven ? . . . On the contrary, most people turn away from the Cross, and flee. But the faster they run the faster the Cross will pursue them ; the more it will cling to them, and the heavier will be its weight. . . If you would be wise, go to meet it like St. Andrew, who, seeing the cross erected for himself, said : ' Hail, good Cross : O admirable and much-desired Cross ! Receive me in thine arms, take me from among men and send me to my Master, who redeemed me by means of thee ! '

“Listen attentively, my children : He who goes to meet the Cross, is in fact avoiding crosses : they may come in his way perhaps ; but he is content that it should be so ; he loves them ; he bears them courageously. They unite him to our Lord ; they purify him ; they detach him from the world ; they remove all obstacles from his heart ; they help him to go through life as a bridge helps to cross a river . . . Look at the saints ! When no one afflicted them they afflicted themselves ; when God sent them no sufferings they found them for themselves . . . One day a good religious complained to our Lord that he was persecuted. He said : ‘ Lord, what have I done that I should be treated so ? ’ Our Lord replied : ‘ And I ? What had I done, that I should be dragged to Calvary ? ’ Then the religious understood ; he wept, and asked pardon, and durst not complain any more.

“ Worldlings grieve when they have crosses, and good Christians grieve when they have none. The Christian passes his existence surrounded by crosses, as the fish lives surrounded by water.

“ We ought to run after crosses, as a miser runs after gold . . . Nothing but the Cross will give us any confidence at the Day of Judgment.

“ The good God would have us never lose sight of the Cross ; and so they are erected everywhere : along the roads, on the heights, in the public squares—to the end that their presence may say to us : ‘ See how much God has loved us ! ’

“ The Cross encircles the world ; it is planted in every quarter of the globe ; and there is a piece of it for everybody.

“ If someone were to say to you : ‘ I should like to become rich. What must I do ? ’ you would reply : ‘ You must work.’ Just so ! and if you want to go to heaven you must suffer. Our Lord showed us the way, in the person of Simon the Cyrenean ; He calls His friends to carry their Cross after Him.

“ Crosses form the road to heaven, just as a stout stone bridge forms the means of passing from one bank of a river to the other. Christians who do not suffer cross the river on a bridge of wire, which is always liable to break under their weight.

“ Whoso loves not the Cross may be saved, but with much difficulty ; he will be a very small star in the firmament. He who shall have suffered and striven for his God will shine like the sun at noon.”

M. Vianney had sundry moving and graceful thoughts on this subject :—

“ Crosses transformed in the flames of love are like bundles of thorns thrown on the fire and reduced to ashes. The thorns may be hard, but the ashes are soft.

“ Oh ! what sweetness do those souls experience who are God’s own by suffering. It is like water in which is mixed a

little vinegar and much oil. The vinegar is always vinegar, but the oil corrects the acidity, and we no longer perceive it.

“ Put a ripe grape under the press, and delicious juice will come forth. A soul under the pressure of the Cross produces a juice that nourishes and strengthens it. When we have no cross, we are arid ; if we bear it with resignation we feel sweetness, happiness, contentment . . . It is the opening of heaven.

“ The good God, the Blessed Virgin, the angels and saints are about our path ; they are at our side and see all we do.

“ The passage hence of a good Christian, tried by affliction, is as one transported on a bed of roses.

“ Thorns give off balm, and the Cross exudes sweetness ; but one must press the thorns in the hand and take the Cross to one's heart if they are to yield up the sugar they contain.”

CHAPTER XX

HOW M. VIANNEY BECAME A SAINT BY THE PRACTICE OF PENANCE AND SELF-ABNEGATION

But upon him shall my sanctification flourish. (Ps. cxxxi., 18.)

What are the signs of one that loves ? He mortifies himself by fasts, vigils, and prayer ; he suppresses pride by being poorly clothed ; his efforts are directed, not to seeking, but to the avoidance of, honours ; he is devoted to the good of souls ; he has no self-love, nor does he love God and his neighbour for his own advantage, but loves God for Himself, and all others for Him ; he has no anxieties about life, death, work, or sufferings : he only seeks the honour of the eternal and supreme Truth. . . . These are the marks of the true servants of God. (St. Catherine, Letter xxix.)

I am about to be tested by a religion at once potent and exacting. Whether I am true metal or false will soon appear. I go to engage in a great struggle, a huge effort, and an immense labour. May Thy power, O Christ, assist me to be victorious ! I am going to desire the love of the Cross ; of which the fervour is even now enkindled within me : and humbly to ask that I may be penetrated with its holy folly. (*Poés. spirit.*, I., i. B. Jacopone da Todi.)

WE have now arrived at the point where our story assumes more directly celestial aspect ; one of divine graces, lights, and prodigies—one in which the marvellous has full play and the extraordinary becomes the supernatural.

It is from the date of the establishment of his *Providence* that the strictly-speaking miraculous life of the Curé of Ars may be said to have commenced. Besides the wonders attending the rise of the *Providence*, the fame attaching to his name, the ever-increasing concourse attracted to his person, and the radiance of a sanctity ever more apparent, doubtless played their part. Thus far we have seen in him a pious, mortified, and charitable priest ; but we have not been impressed—as we shall be henceforward—by those rare and incomparable qualities which go to form the saint.

Fénelon, with that skill which knows how to impart gracefulness and contrast to truth, speaks of certain weaknesses out of keeping with their exalted state which God allows to remain in the souls of the perfect ; just as farmers leave small heaps of earth called *témoins* (marks) on land that has been levelled, to show the depth of soil cleared away by human effort. Almighty God sometimes leaves in great souls these *témoins*, or remnants of human weakness from which they have been in great part freed. But, in the case of M. Vianney, these *témoins* had already disappeared.

Those who only knew him towards the end of his life—when the habit of sanctity had become a second nature in him ; when the practice of the most heroic virtue was so familiar to him as hardly

to cost an effort ; when transformed by and united to Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, he had become one with Him, loving what He loves, and hating what He hates ; unchanging, whatever might happen ; and always following in the steps of his Master—those have only admired the completed work. But, if one were to imagine that in seeking to be a saint the Curé of Ars had been dispensed from the labours and trials by which saints are made, he would be grievously mistaken. “ These that are clothed in white robes, who are they ? and whence came they ? ” asked one of the ancients in the Apocalypse. “ And he said to me : These are they who came out of great tribulation.” (Apoc. vii., 13-14). It is the universal law ; nor was it given to our Saint to become united to Him who is the Saint of saints in any other manner.

✓ How many tribulations, struggles, and trials, did he not pass through before he scaled those heights on which we have seen him repose so peacefully ! And how true is that which a Saint has said : “ Since the beginning of the world, and to the end of it, our Lord has decreed that nothing great shall be accomplished without much suffering ” (St. Catherine, Letter xviii). Sanctity is the fruit of sacrifice ; it is a death and a re-birth—the death of the old man, and the birth of the new. We may now relate some of the sufferings of our holy Curé.

When he first arrived at Ars M. Vianney had with him his good Mère Bibost, of Écully, who came to help him set up house ; but with no idea of remaining permanently. She did not live at the presbytery. As the Ars ménage provided her with little or no occupation, she went abroad a good deal, and never returned empty-handed, for she well knew the ways of the proprietor of the establishment, and never expected to find anything left in the larder. The Curé did not have the advantage of her devoted services for long.

The widow, of whose piety mention has already been made, Claudine Renard, succeeded her. She did all that was necessary for M. Vianney—when he would allow her to do it. But the difficulty was to get him to allow it, and for this she had to make many a detour and return often to the charge. When, by dint of skilful manœuvring, the persevering housekeeper had obtained a “ Yes,” or at least, without saying “ Yes,” he had not said “ No,” she flew to her kitchen ; but while she was busy about her cooking the Curé had had time to prepare his defences ; and when she returned with food she found the door locked against her. Thereupon tears, lamentations, despair !

Not the least of the widow Renard’s troubles was the habit M. Vianney had of never keeping anything for himself. Whatever care she took of the outfit he had inherited from M. Balley, which, without being extensive, was sufficient, it vanished piece by piece. Then she began to give out his linen piecemeal—just

what he wanted at the moment, but no more. This precaution would have been excellent ; but it came too late—when there was hardly anything left to give out.

Although Claudine Renard lived hard by the presbytery, she could not always get in. When, at long intervals, she contrived to effect an entry she made the most of it, by sweeping, dusting, and putting the poor furniture in order. Occasionally—when the master of the house was away—she went so far as to make his bed and straighten out the palliasse, which otherwise would never have been touched. One morning she found the mattress on one side of the bed and the palliasse on the other. Then she understood . . . and burst into tears. This was her usual resource when chance put her in the way of discoveries of this kind ; which is as much as saying she wept often, for the Curé of Ars was ingenious in finding new methods of suffering. So, without more ado, she put the mattresses in place, one on top of the other. A few days later the same happened, and so the contest went on, until M. Vianney, unwilling to contradict or scold, settled the matter by giving the mattress away.

There still remained a feather-bed, which very soon went to rejoin the mattress, and a bolster which took the same route, so that now there was nothing left but the palliasse. But M. Vianney had gone too far along this beautiful road to be able to stop, and his love of penance suggesting that he was too comfortable on the palliasse, he conceived the noble idea of putting a plank in his bed. “ Besides which,” says Catherine, “ there is hardly any straw left in the poor palliasse ; and as he constantly takes out some of the little that remains he will soon be sleeping on the wood. Then M. le Curé will be satisfied. Unknown to him we have tried to put in a few handfuls of straw—in small quantities, so that he may not suspect—but that only makes him take out more ; for finding his bed a little softer than usual, he never ceases to take out straw and put it on the fire. We have often found the ashes in the fireplace . . . ”

As these expedients failed to satisfy the craving for mortification that always went on increasing in M. Vianney, he resolved to leave his bedroom altogether and sleep in the granary. This is how it became known. Overshadowing the square and close to the church was a belt of fine walnut-trees, the produce of which served for the maintenance of the lamp which burned before the Blessed Sacrament. The Curé of Ars, thinking that, in the interests of the church, it would be more profitable to sort and break the nuts than to sell them outright, asked the neighbours to help him in the work, which provided occupation for several long and idle winter evenings. Anybody who would take part was welcome. They were divided into little parties, and as a good deal of noise was made in cracking the nuts, the good Curé, in order to be heard by all, visited each of the groups in turn,

giving to each a share of his conversation. One evening, when he was much exhausted by reason of one of the long fasts to which he frequently condemned himself and after having only struggled against fatigue with effort, M. Vianney asked permission to retire. When the time came to separate, Claudine Renard thought that someone ought to go upstairs in the presbytery, to see if M. Vianney was ailing, or whether he had need of anything. At first the fear of committing an indiscretion made all hold back. At length they decided to make the attempt. They knocked at his door; they called. No reply. The good folks looked at one another with frightened faces. "What if he should be dead?" After a moment's hesitation they opened the door and went straight to the bed; it was empty. After looking everywhere without result the idea of going up to the granary struck someone. When M. Vianney, from the depths of his hiding-place, heard this nocturnal patrol, he cried: "Don't come in! don't come in! there is nothing the matter with me, and I don't want anything." Whereupon the search-party desisted. But widow Renard had a daughter of twenty, whom a sincere piety had not cured of the curiosity natural to her years; and Madame Renard's house was only separated from the presbytery by the thickness of the wall. Thenceforward she devoted herself to finding out the truth concerning these saintly pranks of M. le Curé.

So, instead of going to sleep, Anne Renard kept watch. When the time came at which M. Vianney generally retired she got quietly out of bed, glided upstairs, applied her ear to the wall; and not only assured herself that M. le Curé slept in the granary, but was able to tell her friends that when he got there she heard him move something heavy that made a noise on the floor, and which could be nothing else than a stone to serve as a pillow or mattress.

The Curé of Ars had read in the Life of St. Frances of Rome that her ordinary diet consisted of dry and mouldy bread that had lain some time in the wallet of some mendicant, and which she exchanged with him for good white bread. He was much touched by this practice. During the early days of his ministry, when he fell in with a beggar, he proposed to him to relieve him of the contents of his wallet, for which he paid liberally. There was always to be found in his house a basket filled with this horrible black bread, the very sight of which was repulsive; and this he ate with the utmost satisfaction, because, to his mind, mortification, charity and poverty gave it a celestial flavour of its own.

The Abbé Renard relates in his *Mémoires* that he often had the privilege of witnessing the unalloyed delight with which his good Curé partook of this regal banquet, which caused him (M. Renard) to feel positively ill. If M. Vianney noticed it he would laugh and invite him to share his meal, saying, with a modest grace: "Be happy, my friend, to eat the bread of the



Villard-Vernu, Phot., Ars (Ain).

Furniture and Relics of M. Vianney.

In the background Votive Crutches from the Chapel of St. Philomena.



poor ; they are the friends of Jesus Christ. I feel as though I was sitting at His table." Boiled potatoes completed the bill of fare at the presbytery ; and even these the austere Curé did not always have. Time and again he has been seen to go, saucepan in hand, to beg of his neighbours his week's provision. "These potatoes," we learn from Catherine, "he cooked himself ; and subsisted on them as long as anything remained—they have been known to last eight days. Every evening, on his return home after prayers, he took the lid off the saucepan, often full of scum, took a potato or two, ate it, drank a glass of water, and his supper was finished ; so that it did not take him long."

Never did the thought of his present or prospective needs hinder him from giving alms. One day a neighbour had given him a loaf of good white bread that she had made on purpose for him of pure flour. A moment later she brought a little milk, and wanted to see him take both in her presence, presuming that he had been long fasting. But, insist as she might, it was impossible to get him to do so. At first she failed to understand the reason for his refusal ; then a sudden idea struck her : "I see what it is, Monsieur le Curé, you have no bread left !" Too true ! While she had been to fetch the milk a beggar had called, and the loaf had gone into his wallet just as it was.

From this time forward it seemed to be M. Vianney's principle to go to the very limit of his strength. Many a time in after years, when age had reduced his powers without diminishing his courage, he has been observed to drag himself along by leaning against the walls or the benches in the church. After long days of fasting, when he could hold out no longer, he would take a handful of flour—the sole provision he kept—moisten it with water, and make some *matefaims*. This dainty is indigenous to the Lyons district, and consists of a little flour and water mixed, rolled out into flat cakes, and cooked in a frying-pan. Several times Catherine has heard him say : "How happy was I in those early days ! I had not all these people on my hands ; I was alone . . . When I wanted to dine I wasted no time over it. Three *matefaims* did the business. While I cooked the second I ate the first ; and while I ate the second I cooked the third. I finished my meal by cleaning out my frying-pan and raking out the fire ; then I drank a little water," and that lasted him sometimes for two or three days.

It has been proved beyond doubt that the Curé of Ars passed whole days without taking any food at all. He gave himself up to these immoderate rigours whenever he had an important grace to obtain, a notable conversion in view, when he was in pursuit of some reform, or desirous of rooting out some abuse in the parish, or some grave disorder had afflicted his soul, or when he was impelled to make satisfaction in the place of some great sinner whom the divine mercy had led to him.

His advice was asked one day, as to the course to be pursued in respect of the enjoining of sacramental penance—how to temper due reparation by consideration for human weakness: "Listen," said he, "here is a good recipe; give them a light penance and do the rest yourself."

He had great confidence in fasting as a means of averting the divine justice and of overcoming the powers of darkness. "The devil," said he, "laughs at disciplines and other instruments of penance; at least, if he does not laugh he makes little account of them; and finds other means of arranging for those who use them. But what puts him to flight effectually is privation of food and sleep. There is nothing the devil hates so much and nothing that is so pleasing to the good God. How many times did I not find it so when I was alone for five or six years and could follow my bent without attracting notice. Oh! what graces our Lord deigned to give me then! I obtained anything I wanted from Him."

In after years, his assistant-priest, questioning him about this period of his life, said, "Monsieur le Curé, they say that at one time you could easily pass eight days without eating anything." "Oh! no, my friend," said the good Curé, not seeing that he was walking into a trap, "they have exaggerated. The most I ever did was to go through a week on three meals."

On other occasions he has owned to having abstained from food for entire days, and sometimes for eight-and-forty hours. He has, in like manner, admitted having been obliged to rise at night and take something, for fear of dying from starvation. Once when they had made a particularly good batch of bread at the *Providence* he allowed this to escape him. "For once I must be greedy, and eat as much as I want."

It is quite certain that M. Vianney has passed whole Lents without consuming two pounds of bread; he even tried to live without bread altogether. Close to the presbytery there was, when he came to Ars, a pretty garden planted with fruit-trees; he left it untended and the neighbours used it for pasture. One day, when Claudine Renard led in her cow as usual she caught him in the act of eating a handful of grass. "Eh, what! Monsieur le Curé," cried she, "you are eating grass then?" "Yes, my good Mother Renard," replied he, with a smile. "It is an experiment I am trying; but it does not seem likely to succeed."

"It is plain," he said, long afterwards, to his assistant-priest, "that we are differently made from the beasts. I tried once to live on grass as they do; but I found no strength in it. It seems that bread is necessary to man."

This is borne out by a conversation of Mgr. Devie with his holy Curé. "Did you ever try to live on grass and roots, like your predecessors the Fathers of the Desert?" "Monseigneur," ingenuously replied M. Vianney, "I did try it once, for a week;

but I could not go on with it. You see, I am not a saint like they were."

"One day," says Catherine, "I entreated M. le Curé to take a little more food. I said to him: 'You really cannot go on like this.' 'Oh!' replied he, gaily, 'what does our Lord say? 'I have other food which is to do the will of Him that sent me.''" Then he added: 'I have a good *carcase*; I am tough. After I have eaten something—no matter what—or slept for a couple of hours I can begin again. When you have fed a horse a little he goes on as though there was nothing the matter, and a horse hardly ever sleeps.'"

But it sometimes came about that this good *carcase*, from sheer overwork, was unable to do any more. M. Vianney was forced to confess: "There are some days when I can hardly speak, especially about seven o'clock in the morning and evening; but when it is a question of talking of the good God I can find plenty of strength."

This feebleness was more particularly noticeable at the night prayers, when all that remained was a mere thread of a voice, so thin that it was necessary to strain the ears to follow him. "Monsieur le Curé," said someone, "how is it that when you pray it is so difficult to hear you; but when you preach you speak quite loud?" "Because," replied he, "when I am preaching I talk to those who are deaf or asleep; but when I pray I am talking to the good God; and the good God is not deaf."

The truth is that M. Vianney always taxed his powers to the uttermost. He was the absolute despair of Mademoiselle d'Ars, who said to him: "My good Curé, do take a little more care of yourself! You give me constant distractions . . . When I hear you recite the rosary in a voice so feeble and worn-out instead of responding: 'Holy Mary, Mother of God . . . ' I find myself saying: 'My God, have pity on him; give him strength to go on to the end . . . '"

It was not only anxiety that the saintly rigours of her Curé occasioned to Mademoiselle d'Ars; sometimes she got seriously angry. She scolded, and threatened to report him to the Archbishop. But already the ecclesiastical superiors were much concerned at all they heard of a life so austere. The Abbé Courbon, Vicar-General of the archdiocese, of which Ars still formed part, wished him to improve his dietary. He feared that the Curé was wanting in discretion, and that such pious excesses would ruin his health. Since he had introduced him into the sanctuary, he regarded him as in some sort a child of his own; and had transferred to him the affection he had entertained for M. Balley when he was alive. "Give my regards to the Abbé Vianney," said he, one day, to an ecclesiastic who was setting out for Ars. "Above all, recommend him on my behalf to take a little more food. We are interested to conserve him. Try to make him

understand that heaven is not stormed by famine." "The Vicar-General is very kind," replied the good Curé, when the message was delivered, "I am unworthy that anyone should take any interest in me." But he did neither more nor less.

The only occasion when he relaxed his austere habits in any degree was when charity urged him to do the honours to any colleague who came to see him. Then he despatched a messenger to Mademoiselle d'Ars, and she hastened to provide a suitable dinner. If it were too near noon to be able to have recourse to the château, Mademoiselle Pignaut or Claudine Renard took the matter in hand, and improvised a meal which, simple as it might be, was vastly different from his own.

Here is the account an excellent curé gave us of the hospitality he received at Ars about that time: "M. Vianney very kindly had a little dinner prepared for us—cooked I don't know where, for the hearth of his kitchen has never seen a fire. There was an omelet, a piece of cheese, a bottle of ordinary country wine; there may have been soup, I don't recollect exactly, for that day one forgot one had a body—alas! for twenty-four hours only—and saw nothing but the Curé of Ars. To do honour to his guests he ate two or three mouthfuls . . . But his words—all fire—and his tears—all love—never ceased during the time we were at table. Sometimes he stood up while we remained seated, and discoursed of heavenly things, like a man lost in God."

He had the same consideration for his relations whenever they came to Ars; he suspended for the nonce his penitential regime. "He always showed himself hospitable to us," said his nephew and niece of Dardilly. When they went to see him he received them at the presbytery—Catherine and Jean-Marie were outside all his rules. He dined with them and sat down, which he never permitted himself to do in ordinary circumstances. He carved, poured out the wine, and graciously did all the honours of the table. He encouraged them to eat, and ate of everything himself without affectation, setting aside his own habits as it were by virtue. "But," added these good people, "when we were at Ars we felt neither hunger nor thirst; *it was like the day of our First Communion.*" M. Vianney took advantage of these visits to inquire after his old friends at Dardilly, of whom he spoke kindly. He recalled with pleasure the reminiscences of his youth, and always asked about his great apple-tree at *Chêne-Rond*, under the shade of which the reapers used to sit for rest and food.

Under the pretext of the various services they had rendered him, but really in order to satisfy their curiosity—perhaps also to see what he would do—Mademoiselle Pignaut and the widow Renard often teased M. Vianney for not having invited them. So many meals as they had prepared for his friends seemed to them to deserve this little attention. One evening then, when M. le Curé had just replenished his stock of the bread of the poor

and his basket was full, he went to call on his neighbour. "Claudine," said he, in a more lively tone than usual, "will you come to my house presently, and bring your daughter and Mademoiselle Pignaut? I want you all three." The three women were highly delighted, and impatiently waited for the appointed time to arrive, that they might learn what it was that M. le Curé wanted with them. "What do I want with you?" said he, when they arrived. "Can't you guess? I want you to sup with me. Are you not pleased? . . . Take chairs and sit down. What a feast we will have! . . . We will eat the bread of the poor, who are the friends of our Lord; and we will drink the good water of the good God. So much for the body. And meanwhile we will read the Lives of those good Saints, so penitent and so mortified. So much for the soul. Come! let us get to work."

The good Curé had laid the table and put on the viands. In the middle was the basket with the bread of the poor; on his right a large folio volume of the Lives of the Saints; on his left a pitcher of water and a wooden cup. At sight of this grand preparation Claudine Renard, who was in the secret, caught M. le Curé's eye and smiled; the other two were a trifle disconcerted. Without appearing to notice their embarrassment, M. le Curé gravely blessed the table, and offered each of his guests a piece of bread. "I dared not refuse," said Anne Renard, when she told the story afterwards. "I got to the end of my piece of bread—somehow; but Mademoiselle Pignaut, with all the good will in the world, could not manage to swallow hers. During the time the visit lasted she was on tenterhooks, never having taken part in such an entertainment before. She never spoke of a second invitation."

We do not know how this episode will strike our readers; but to us it has always seemed charming. It recalls a passage in the life of St. Francis, who, when he was at Assisi, often visited St. Clare, and gave her his saintly instructions. She had a great desire to partake of a meal in his company; but he would never allow her this consolation. Therefore his companions said to him: "Father, it seems to us that this extreme rigidity in not gratifying Sister Clare, that holy virgin and so dear to God, in such a small matter as a meal taken in her society, is not according to divine charity. Truly, if she had asked a much greater grace than that you would accord it to your spiritual child." St. Francis made answer: "Since it seems so to you, it seems so to me. But, in order that she may be still more consoled, I desire that this repast may take place at St. Mary-of-the-Angels, where she took the veil and became a spouse of Jesus Christ; and we will take our meal together there in the name of God."

The day arrived; and at the appointed hour St. Francis had a dinner made ready on the ground, as was his custom, and the guests sat down—St. Francis and St. Clare, one of his com-

panions and one of hers. For the first course St. Francis commenced to discourse on God in a manner so suave, so sublime, and so marvellous, that divine grace descended in abundance, and all were ravished in God. Returning to themselves after a long space of time, they felt themselves so much strengthened by this spiritual refreshment that they no longer thought of nourishment for the body. Thus ended this repast of benediction, which left St. Clare exceedingly consoled.

With such complete self-control and such entire forgetfulness of his own wants the Curé of Ars must have often lacked the bare necessities of life, had divine Providence not come to his assistance with a series of helpers, of which the chain, which continued down to the end of his life, forms one of the most singular features of an existence singular in itself. Shortly before he died he said, as he pointed to a noble and saintly young lady, whose admirable devotion will never be known: "There is my nurse!" And it was true. A nurse was indeed necessary to a man who never thought about himself, who counted his own health and well-being as nothing, and who voluntarily reduced himself—in all that concerned the body and its needs—to the passive state of an infant in arms.

We have already seen a succession of individuals enlist themselves in M. Vianney's service. The good widow of Écully, Mademoiselle Pignaut, and Claudine Renard all came without solicitation on his part and without any interest of their own to serve. When the last-mentioned devoted and discreet house-keeper was no more—which happened all too soon—she was at once replaced by a good woman from Forez, a fresh link in the chain. She was a kind of religious without a veil, and was called Sœur Lacon. She had assisted at the last moments of the venerable Père Gachon, deceased in the odour of sanctity at the hospital at Ambert; and was full of the virtues and incidents of the life of that holy missionary. She carried on a petty trade in objects of piety; and followed the missions that were given round about. She now found her happiness in rendering M. Vianney all sorts of services—and was never so pleased as when she had induced him to submit to some alleviation of his inexorable regime. But such victories were few and far between; for the most part, repulsed with loss, she was compelled to wait until some lucky chance allowed her to get at the presbytery. Then, she slipped in furtively and deposited the provisions which M. le Curé did not want to accept; when, thinking she had gained her point, she would rejoice over her triumph—until next morning she recognised her gifts in the wallet of some beggar who came to ask alms at her door; and which had passed at one bound into the hands of the first person who desired to have the advantage of them. Then ensued tribulation, wrath and endless lamentations, which, while they made the culprit laugh, amended him not a whit.

We find here, in the *Mémoires* of Catherine, sundry amusing and characteristic incidents, which it were a pity to leave untold. One day Mademoiselle Lacon made a pie for the delectation of her Curé. When it was baked to perfection, the crust all crisp and brown, she drew it from the oven and put it in an old cupboard in the presbytery, thinking that this part of the house being abandoned her treasure would be safe there. She waited impatiently till evening, and when M. Vianney came in after his day's work assumed her most insinuating manner as she said: "Monsieur le Curé, could you eat a little piece of pie?" "Yes," he answered at once, "I should like it very much." Delighted at an acquiescence to which she was unaccustomed, she ran to her hiding-place. But, oh! sorrow! there was no pie there. What could have become of it? She went upstairs, burning with indignation. "Monsieur le Curé, it is too bad! that pie was mine; I did not give it to you!" "Why did you put it in the presbytery, then?" M. Vianney replied, tranquilly. "I suppose that what I find in my house belongs to me, and that I can do as I like with it."

The good Catherine, in her notes, here takes up the cudgels for Sœur Lacon, remarking that she had taken great pains to prepare a little surprise for the holy Curé, and was sixty years of age and far from agile. She had one leg shorter than the other, and only walked with difficulty, on account of her pains and rheumatism. On the other hand, Catherine recognises that M. le Curé only wished to try her, knowing that she was a good soul and that the more sacrifices he caused her to make the more she would advance in God's service.

That Mademoiselle Lacon was a good soul, without malice or rancour, is evident from the fact that within a few days of the episode of the pie she proposed to M. Vianney to make him some *matefaims*. "I should like them very much," replied he, with an alacrity that should have warned her of impending trouble. But she, suspecting nothing, set to work at once to mix flour and beat up eggs; then, as she was a little doubtful about her own skill, called in Mademoiselle Pignaut to help. The Curé watched all these preparations with mischief in his eye. When all was ready the dish was solemnly placed before him. He joined his hands and raised his eyes, as if about to say grace; then, while they made the sign of the Cross devoutly he took the dish, went rapidly downstairs with it, to distribute its contents among the poor.

It was not uncommon to encounter M. Vianney in the street with something hidden under his soutane; and he was much perturbed when he failed to find the individual for whom his gift was intended. He would then put it down in some corner while he went to scour the village, and on his return usually found that dogs or cats had devoured his provisions. At other times he

would knock at door after door, to find the person he was in quest of ; but he was much upset if he met anybody who was likely to guess the nature of his errand.

There was an old blind woman who lived beside the church, and was particularly favoured. She came in for a goodly share of his alms, because she had the great advantage—in his eyes—of not being able to see who it was to whom she was indebted. He usually found her sitting in her house, stripping hemp ; he would approach discreetly, place in her apron whatever he had brought, and without uttering a sound. She would feel what it was ; and supposing the giver to be one of her charitable neighbours, say : “ Many thanks, my dear, many thanks.” And the Curé of Ars would withdraw, laughing heartily. Not content with taking the good old lady anything he thought she would like, he paid her rent and saw that she wanted for nothing.

Several people, well aware of his chronic propensity for almsgiving, attempted to exploit him ; and would promise him money for his poor, on condition that he would nourish himself better. It is not recorded that he was ever taken in this snare, save on one occasion when, for ten francs, he consented to eat a chicken.

When his orphanage was in full work M. Vianney, only too happy to be numbered among the children to whom divine Providence sent their daily bread, went thither for such food as he allowed himself to take. As he was the father of the establishment, so he delighted to be the first child ; and to consider himself as an orphan, dependent on charity. But, limited as were the preparations made for his dinner, he was always disposed to think that too much care was taken of him ; and sweetly complained to the directresses : “ I have often thought, though I did not dare to say so, that if you had more charity for me and for souls you would make nothing ready for me. I should do a little penance, and everybody would be the better.”

Often he returned from the church completely exhausted and obliged to sit down because his legs gave way under him. He was then as pleased as a man who has done something really remarkable ; he laughed a good hearty laugh, and alternately joked and chided *Adam* (as he was accustomed to call his body) ; or he would say : “ Steady ! my poor *Colon*, keep up ! ” in playful allusion to a drunkard of that name, who was wont thus to apostrophise his recalcitrant legs.

Once M. Vianney found himself verging on this condition in the confessional. “ I had better go while I can,” he reflected, “ without waiting till I have to be carried.” So he made a great effort and dragged himself to the *Providence*. When he got there, breathless and pale as death, he asked for some eau-de-Cologne. “ Well, M. le Curé,” said Catherine, as she anxiously fluttered round him, “ you really ought to be happy this time . . . you have gone about as far as you can go ! ” And indeed, under his

pale and drawn features, the joy of his soul could be clearly discerned. "He seemed," says Catherine, "as though he had gained a great victory over an enemy—himself in fact—and was laughing at him. He would accept nothing but a little eau-de-Cologne; and as soon as he felt better he escaped into the next room to give his catechism to the children."

"Ordinarily," adds Catherine, "when his catechism is finished, he finds a little earthenware pipkin, containing milk just coloured with chocolate, standing by the fireside. It is only lately that he has been induced to allow himself the chocolate, which was the gift of a good woman, in the interest of his health. As a rule he takes this repast—if it can be called one—standing in the chimney-corner. It often happens that he drinks his milk without putting any bread into it. It is quickly finished; I don't think he allows himself more than five minutes for the operation. When he is pressed for time he returns to the presbytery, pipkin in hand. To see him crossing the square like this one would take him for a beggar who had just received an alms; and he is never more pleased than when this mistake is made."

An ecclesiastic, newly-arrived, surprised him one day in these conditions. "Are you the Curé of Ars, of whom everyone talks?" "Yes, my good friend, I am indeed the poor Curé of Ars." "This is a little too much!" said the priest, drawing back in evident disappointment. "I had imagined an imposing personage, with some presence and address. But it is far otherwise! This little Curé has not a particle of dignity, and eats in the open street like a beggar. It is a mystery altogether!" When this was repeated to the holy Curé he was vastly amused; and always loved to tell the story afterwards. "This worthy gentleman was well caught; he expected to find something at Ars, and he found nothing." We hasten to add, however, that after a second interview the ecclesiastic found reason to change his opinion, and regard M. Vianney with admiration. He made a good retreat, and departed another victim to the charm exerted by the Curé of Ars.

In those days M. Vianney was able to attend the periodical meetings of the clergy of the district, which were then beginning to be established, under the name of "Conferences." But when the proceedings came to an end he quietly disappeared; and was generally absent from the dinner that followed. When the Conference was held at Ars, and it was his turn to receive his colleagues, the subsequent entertainment was given at the château; and Mademoiselle d'Ars, only too proud to represent her Curé, presided at the gathering, and by her unaffected gaiety and simplicity set everyone at ease.

The apparel of M. Vianney corresponded with his diet. Much as he loved order and cleanliness—which St. Francis of Sales used to call the demi-virtues—all through life, led by the spirit of

penance and detachment, he never would have more than one soutane. That one he wore until it was in rags, regardless of stains or holes ; and he would have it washed or mended when it would not hold together otherwise ; but he would not accept a new one till the old was no longer wearable. A spare soutane seemed to him a luxury. The same was true of his hat, which in time lost all shape ; and of his shoes, which were never approached by brush or blacking. Thus arrayed he attended the Conferences and other ecclesiastical reunions, braving the raillery of his colleagues, who expended much small wit at the expense of his patched and darned soutane, brown shoes, disreputable hat, ragged cincture, his *rabat** all frayed and ill-adjusted, and the general disorder of his get-up. His reply was invariably the same. " Good enough for the Curé of Ars ! Quite good enough for the Curé of Ars. Who do you suppose would be offended at it all ? When you have said : ' It is the Curé of Ars,' there is an end of the matter."

Thus did M. Vianney become a saint by the exercise of the highest contemplation and the most austere penance, conforming himself to the example of his adorable Master and of those great personalities, to find whom one must go back to the earliest ages of the Church—then almost within living memory of the scenes of the Passion. Thus did he comply with the first condition exacted by our Lord from him that would be His disciple—to die to self in order to be reborn to Him.

It was by sparing himself in nothing and applying fire and steel to the most sensitive parts of his being ; it was by the Cross and by sacrifice that, little by little, he accomplished the death of every atom of self-love. A death indeed ! but what a renaissance ! To rise above the gloomy and laden atmosphere of this world into the light and supernatural atmosphere of the world to come ; to escape from the trammels of his natural state, the monotony of his own thoughts, the narrow bounds of his personal horizon—which always grow narrower with advancing years ; to quit the finite in order to attain to the infinite—such is the reward of sacrifice and the happy state of the soul that dies to this life that it may live in God. And such, at the period of which we write, was the state of the Curé of Ars. Having overcome the exigencies of egoism, nothing hindered him from following the dictates of the Holy Spirit. He had removed all obstacles and broken the bonds that attached his heart to anything less than the sovereign good. His will, united with that of God, soared above the desires of the world ; his views and affections were supernaturalised, while his heart opened to receive every creature for whom Christ died. And he could say with St. Paul : " For to me, to live is Christ . . . Furthermore I count all things to be but loss for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord ;

* *Rabat* : neck-band worn by the parish clergy in some of the dioceses of France.

for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but as dung, that I may gain Christ . . . the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death . . . Not as though I had already attained, or were already perfect ; but I follow after . . . But one thing I do : forgetting the things that are behind, and stretching forth myself to those that are before, I press towards the mark, to the prize of the supernal vocation of God in Christ Jesus " (Philip. i., 21 and iii., 8-10-12-13-14).

CHAPTER XXI

HOW M. VIANNEY WAS PERSECUTED BY DEVILS

And the Lord said to Satan : Hast thou considered my servant . . . that there is none like him in the earth, a man simple and upright, and fearing God, and avoiding evil ? . . . Behold he is in thy hand, but yet save his life. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord, and struck Job. (Job ii., 3-6-7.)

Thus is the devil vanquished when we are ill-treated ; for he is caught by the sufferings he would inflict upon us, and which fall upon himself. (St. John Chrys. Hom. xxv.)

By unceasing invocation of thee, O Christ, Sovereign most holy, this just man trampled upon the deceits of the devils. (Roman Breviary, Hymn Conf.)

BOSSUET observes in his *Discours sur les Démon*s that what we lose for the flesh is gained for the spirit. Fasting strengthens and enriches the soul, and in proportion as we subdue the body by mortification and penance we weaken the forces of our irreconcilable enemy. Bossuet adds that it is this that increases the fury of the devils ; “ for it is all-devouring envy which so inflames them against us. They see that although we are their inferiors by nature we surpass them infinitely by grace ; they are unable to contemplate without extreme displeasure how by the divine mercy we are enabled, even in our corporeal state, to approach to the purity of the incorporeal.” (Sermon for the First Sunday in Lent.)

The life of M. Vianney confirms this doctrine in a very striking manner. One had said that the more he got the better of the devil the more the devil was incensed against him. “ When you overcome him,” remarks Tertullian, “ you do not daunt his audacity, but you inflame his rage.” (*De pœnit.* No. 7). That is to say, that this proud spirit, who aspired to be the equal of God, cannot understand how a simple creature can be capable of resisting him ; and the more efforts a great soul puts forth to free itself from his dominion, the more he erects his formidable batteries against it. Aware that the majesty of God is beyond the reach of his fury ; he pours out upon man, who is His living image, the vials of his wrath, just as an impotent foe who cannot strike the object of his enmity vents the wildness of his vengeful spirit by the destruction of his portrait.

Hence these struggles, so frequent in the lives of the saints, in which the infernal powers, acting as the instruments of divine Providence, contribute to the perfection of God’s elect by the temptations to which they subject them and the victories to which they lead them.

One cannot utter the word “ temptation ” without the memory of the Thebaïd immediately coming before the mind ; for the

temptations of St. Anthony have become proverbial. During the time he dwelt in the mountain of Kolsim, whence he ruled over the desert and several generations of cœnobites, the numberless visitors of his terrible solitude hardly ever approached it without hearing a confused and terrible sound of voices of all sorts, the clashing of arms and the stamping of horses, as though he were besieged by an army of invisible spirits. St. Hilarion was no sooner at prayer than he heard the baying of hounds, bellowing of bulls, hissing of serpents, and the various and terrible cries of different monsters trying to affright him. Devils made such an uproar round the cell of St. Pachomius that they seemed about to destroy it utterly. They appeared to St. Abraham, axes in hand, as if to demolish his hut ; at other times they set fire to the mat on which he prayed.

The lives of St. Benedict, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Anthony of Padua, St. John of God, St. Vincent Ferrer, St. Peter of Alcantara, St. Nicholas of Tolentino—to name only the most famous : also those of St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, St. Catherine of Genoa, St. Margaret of Cortona, St. Frances of Rome, St. Rose of Lima, St. Hedwig, St. Lidwina, St. Teresa : and, coming to an age nearer to our own, those of John de Castillo, Sebastian del Campo, Jesuits ; Dominic of Jesu-Maria, Discalced Carmelite ; Christine of Stommelm, Crescentia of Kaufbeuren, Christine the Admirable, The Solitary of the Rocks, Benoîte, the little shepherdess of Laus, and Marie de Moerl, the ecstatic of the Tyrol, all offer striking resemblances to the events we are about to relate.

M. Vianney had been six years at Ars ; he had recently opened his house of refuge for little orphan girls of the neighbourhood, when strange noises began to be heard in the presbytery and to destroy his night's rest. This is the account he gave himself of the origin of the persecution :—

“ The first time the devil came to annoy me was at nine o'clock one night, just as I was about to go to bed. Three great blows resounded on the outer door, as if someone were trying to break in with an enormous club. I opened my window immediately and called : ‘ Who is there ? ’ but seeing nothing, I went quietly to bed, commending myself to God. I had not fallen asleep when three more blows, more violent than the first, were struck, not on the outer door, but on the door of the staircase leading to my room. I rose again and called a second time : ‘ Who is there ? ’ . . . There was no reply.

“ When the noises commenced I imagined that they were made by thieves who had been attracted by the handsome vestments of M. le Vicomte d'Ars, and deemed it wise to take precautions. I asked two stout-hearted men to sleep at the presbytery, so as to be able to come to my assistance in case of need. They came several nights in succession ; they heard the noise, but could discover nothing, and became firmly convinced that the dis-

turbance had some other cause than human malice. I became of the same opinion myself, for, one winter night, after a heavy fall of snow, three terrific blows resounded towards the middle of the night. I jumped precipitately out of bed and descended to the courtyard, certain of finding the evil-doers in full flight and proposing to call for help. But to my intense astonishment I saw nothing, I heard nothing; and, what is more, I could discern no traces of footsteps in the snow . . . Then I had not a doubt but that it was the devil who wished to terrify me. I abandoned myself to the will of God, praying Him to be my guardian and defender; and, with His angels, be near me when my enemy should come again to trouble me."

If the object of the devil was to strike terror into the heart of the poor Curé he succeeded only too well, for M. Vianney owned that on these first occasions, when the origin of these mysterious noises—which were repeated every night and continued for hours together—was unknown to him, he almost died of fright in his bed; his health was profoundly affected, and he seemed to shrivel up and wither away visibly. Charitable persons offered to mount guard over the presbytery and sleep in the adjoining room. Young men armed and established themselves in the belfry opposite, so as to be able to command the approaches to the house.

Perhaps the man who had the worst experience was André Verchère, the village wheelwright. When his turn came he was installed in a room in the presbytery with his gun. At midnight a horrible noise commenced in this room and at his very side; it seemed to him that the furniture was being smashed to splinters under a storm of blows. The poor sentinel cried "Help," and the Curé ran in. Together they looked, examined every nook and corner, but nothing was to be seen.

When M. Vianney was assured that no natural explanation would account for the uproar he dismissed his guards, whose presence was evidently useless. He became less afraid, and ended by getting accustomed to it.

He confided to us that previous to this period of external trial he had endured another, which consisted in being afflicted in the most persistent manner with thoughts of despair. Hell appeared to open continually at his very feet, and a voice warned him that his own place therein was already prepared. The fear of being lost haunted him day and night. After having fought and overcome this temptation, an external strife was more easy. Nevertheless, what constancy and strength of mind must he not have required! For this martyrdom was not for some few nights only; it continued five-and-thirty years. The phases might differ and the form vary, but there was hardly ever any intermission.

Ordinarily at midnight three heavy blows on the door of the presbytery warned M. Vianney of the presence of his enemy, and, according as his sleep was either sound or light, other blows

succeeded—more or less violent, but coming nearer the while. After diverting himself by making a hideous clatter on the stairs the devil entered the room, seized hold of the curtains of the bed and shook them with fury, as if he would tear them to pieces. The poor victim within could never understand how it was that a rag of them was left.

Sometimes it would happen that the malevolent spirit would knock at the door, like someone asking permission to come in ; an instant after, without waiting for the door to be opened, he would enter the room, moving the chairs, disarranging the furniture, and rummaging everywhere ; at the same time calling to the Curé in a mocking tone : “ Vianney ! Vianney ! ”—adding threats and outrageous abuse : “ Eater of potatoes ! we shall have thee sure enough ! Get along ! we are certain to have thee ! We have thee ! We have thee ! ” At other times, without taking the trouble to come upstairs, he would shout the same from the middle of the courtyard ; and after vociferating for a long time he would simulate a charge of cavalry or the noise of an army on the march. Now he would appear to drive nails into a plank with a heavy hammer, cleave timber, plane wood, or saw the panelling, like a carpenter in full work on the interior of the house ; then he would tap continuously the night long, till it seemed to M. Vianney that he must surely find his ceiling riddled with holes in the morning ; again, he would beat the “ devil’s tattoo ” on the table, chimney-piece, but more usually on the water-jug, showing a preference for the most resonant objects.

Anon the Curé heard the sound of a runaway horse in the room below ; the animal appeared to bound up to the ceiling and land heavily on all fours. Yet again a gendarme in thick boots seemed to be ascending the stairs and making his heels tell on each step ; or a great flock of sheep would seem to be grazing just above his head—impossible to sleep amid such a monotonous movement of feet. One night when M. Vianney was more than usually worn out, he said : “ My God, I willingly make Thee the sacrifice of a few hours sleep for the conversion of sinners.” The infernal horde took themselves off instantly, and the poor Curé got a little rest. We had these details from M. Vianney himself.

For several consecutive nights he heard a clamour in the courtyard, so loud and menacing that he trembled with fear. Voices were talking in an unknown tongue and with the utmost incoherence—in such sort that they revived in him the still-fresh memory of the invasion. He used to compare their tumult to the noise of an Austrian army ; and sometimes used a comparison not less characteristic in saying that troops of devils had held their *Parliament* in his courtyard. St. Teresa relates that she heard the same thing, remarking that the members of this infernal parliament seemed to be hatching some conspiracy. (Cf. *Autobiography*, ch. xxxi.),

As may well be imagined, these events made a great sensation. As usual, they gave rise to every sort of diverse and contradictory rumour. It was unfortunate that they should have occurred during the dark hours. Night is the accomplice of error, and imports a vague element of uncertainty into the doings it covers with its shadows—of which the critical can easily avail themselves, and incredulity is swift to take advantage. At the same time it is not to be supposed that M. Vianney was mistaken or that he would have wished to be so. Those who have known him are convinced that death itself would have been preferable to falsehood. Nor had he the temperament of a visionary; he was not in the least credulous. He possessed all the qualities of a reliable witness: good sight, good hearing, and a well-balanced judgment. These things did not happen once only, but hundreds and hundreds of times for thirty years; they were affirmed by him thousands of times: there was no subject on which he was more willing to speak.

Thus we find in Catherine's notes the accounts of numerous disclosures received day by day from the lips of the holy Curé himself, and contemporaneous with the very first of the persecutions he endured. We may be permitted to give a few of them textually:—

"M. le Curé has said to us several times during the last few days: 'I don't know whether they are devils; but they come in great troops—one would say it is a flock of sheep. I am almost unable to sleep.' A few days later he said: 'Last night, just as I was getting to sleep, the *grappin** commenced to make a noise like a cooper driving hoops on a cask.'

"18th August, 1825—M. le Curé told us yesterday that the devil sang in his chimney like a nightingale."

A perusal of Görres'† work *La Mystique* will convince one that there is no single one of the incidents just mentioned that has not its analogy in the records of diabolic mysticism: blows on doors, singing in chimneys, howling of wild beasts, noises of every description . . . In particular, Chapters XXI. and XXII. of Book V. deal with a spirit who scratched at the door, sang in the chimney, crawled under a bed, or got behind a pillow, imitated the noise of wild animals, and panted like a breathless dog . . .

We continue from Catherine's notes:—

"18th October.—M. le Curé told us yesterday that the devil had attempted to kill him.

"4th December.—M. le Curé came to see us this evening, and said: 'I have something to tell you. The *grappin* paid me his

**Grappin*: a nickname by which, in his lighter moments, M. Vianney was accustomed to refer to the devil. Great souls think alike: Mademoiselle de Montmorency, in *La Solitaire des Rochers*, called him *Le Teigneux*.

†Johann Joseph Görres, a doughty champion of the Catholic Faith who died in 1848. He devoted much time to the study of mysticism, both celestial and diabolic.

usual visit, and sniffed at me so hard that I thought he must find me unpleasant. Then he appeared to vomit out gravel or some such material in my room. I said to him: "I shall go over there (to the *Providence*) and tell them all about you, so that they may have a contempt for you." He departed instantly.' "

But here is something more extraordinary, which causes us to exclaim with Bossuet: "Who may understand the wiles of Satan, and by what devices the serpent crawls?" (*Sermons sur les Démon*s).

"One night," it is Catherine who speaks "M. le Curé came over to us to see a sick person. On my return from the church, he said: 'You enjoy a bit of news: well, I have something quite fresh for you. Listen to what happened this morning. I had something on my table—you understand what it was, eh? (It was his discipline). It began to crawl like a serpent. That rather startled me. You know there is a piece of cord at the end of it. I took hold of this cord; it was stiff as a piece of wood. I put it back on the table, and it recommenced to crawl three times.' 'Perhaps you jogged the table?' objected one of the mistresses who was present at the conversation.' 'No,' replied M. le Curé, 'I didn't touch it.' "

Here is evidence clear and precise; and which the Curé of Ars was in no wise reluctant to retail. But, nevertheless, scepticism persevered—especially among the clergy. We may remark, by the way, what a mistake it is to suppose the clergy a credulous body. Credulity is in the inverse ratio of faith. "Philosophers: a credulous race!" said a wise man.

Belief in something we must have. This need is so imperative in man that he prefers to believe too much—would rather believe everything than believe nothing; and even abdicate his reason than renounce all belief in anything. Who does not believe in God is so much nearer belief in the devil. But when one has submitted one's reason to the divine light of faith, what need of believing anything but what God has revealed and Holy Church teaches?

The colleagues of the Curé of Ars then evinced little disposition in general to admit the reality of these diabolic manifestations. They sought to find natural and physiological causes; and they found them in the prolonged fasts and immoderate vigils of the holy man—an explanation more summary and convenient than convincing. "If the Curé of Ars," they said, "would only live like other men; if he would only take his proper allowance of food and sleep, all this effervescence of his imagination would calm down; his brain would no longer be peopled with spectres, and all this infernal phantasmagoria would vanish."

Thus do they reason who approach a subject with preconceived ideas; thus did the eighteenth century reason; and in our own day there exist certain circles incapable of reasoning otherwise.

The supernatural sense is so enfeebled among us that we cannot bring ourselves to believe in phenomena which are outside the natural sphere in which we habitually live. We would rather deny facts or attribute them to illusion and superstition than be at the pains of examining them seriously, and thereby exposing ourselves to the risk of encountering some superior and invisible agency whose existence we doubt. The marvellous repels as much as it attracts ; we would know it, but dare not approach it.

We have only a few words to add concerning the so-called physiological explanations of phenomena of this kind. If these explanations are to be admitted when it is a question of accounting for facts accompanied by concomitant pathological circumstances which reveal their natural origin, from which as a rule they do not vary, it becomes impossible to attribute the same origin to them when they are found—as in the case of M. Vianney—to be combined with serenity of ideas, accuracy of perception, clarity of view, soundness of judgment, perfect self-possession, and an almost miraculous bodily health which hardly ever failed, even in the midst of the incessant labours which absorbed the life of the Curé of Ars. Besides, these extraordinary circumstances which were sensible to him were, in many instances, equally so to others. Evidence on this point is by no means wanting. Is it necessary then—in order to enjoy the vain pleasures of doubt—to cast baseless suspicion on testimony so reputable and disinterested ? Rather let us say that an obstinate scepticism in the presence of supernatural events such as we have related implies—above all to Catholics—a mental infirmity, as evident as that reasonable belief to which it pleases these pretended “strong minds” to give the name of blind credulity.

While these prejudices were at their highest an event took place, the details of which have been related in the same manner by the various persons who witnessed them. One of these witnesses is still alive (this was originally written in 1861), and has offered to attest them :—

In the winter of 1826 there was at St. Trivier-sur-Moignans a venerable Curé, M. Granger, who had known M. Vianney since the first days of his ministry at Ars, had learned to appreciate, and came often to see him. Anxious to obtain for his parishioners the benefit of the presence among them of a priest so mortified and zealous, he begged him to join the missionaries who were then giving the exercises of the Great Jubilee. M. Vianney complied, and remained three weeks at St. Trivier, preaching occasionally and hearing many confessions.

As the vexations to which he was subjected at the hands of the devil were making a great stir just then, his colleagues thought fit to amuse themselves at his expense. “Come ! come ! dear Curé, do as others do,” said they, “feed better ; that is the way to get rid of all this diablerie.”

One evening the conversation took a higher tone ; discussion waxed warm on the part of the doubters, and finally took the form of hostile and unrestrained criticism. It was agreed that all this infernal mysticism was nothing better than fancy, delirium, hallucination ; and the poor Curé was treated as nothing better than a visionary and a maniac. He answered not a word to these learned diatribes, but retired to his own room, insensible to everything save the joy of having been humiliated. Soon after the reverend and sceptical gentlemen wished each other good-night, and gained their respective apartments with the indifference of sages, who if they believed in the devil at all, had only a very mediocre belief in his interference in the affairs of the Curé of Ars.

But lo ! at midnight they are suddenly awakened by a horrible disturbance ; the presbytery is turned upside down ; doors bang, window-panes rattle, the walls shake, and ominous crackings betoken that they are about to fall in. In an instant everybody is out of bed. They recall what the Curé of Ars had said : " Don't be surprised if you happen to hear a noise to-night." They burst into his room—he is resting tranquilly. " Get up ! get up !" they cry, " the house is falling ! " " Oh ! I know very well what it is," replies he, smiling. " Go you to your beds ; there is nothing to fear." They are reassured, and the uproar gradually subsides.

An hour later, when all is quiet, there is a gentle ring at the street-door bell. The Abbé Vianney rises, answers it, and finds a man who has walked several leagues to make his confession to him. He goes to the church at once, and stays there till Mass, occupied in hearing a great number of penitents.

One of the missionaries, the Abbé Chevalon of pious memory and formerly soldier of the Empire, was so much impressed by this strange adventure that he said when relating it : " I have promised the good God never more to jest about these stories of apparitions and nocturnal disturbances ; and as to the Curé of Ars, I take him to be a saint."

The reader will doubtless have remarked the coincidence of the happenings of the night and the arrival of the sinner from afar to make his confession. It was an ordinary event, which, after numerous instances, ended by becoming an almost infallible indication. Whenever the visitations of the devil redoubled their frequency and intensity the Curé of Ars foresaw that grace would shortly lead some great sinner to him for conversion. His presentiments were rarely unverified ; so much so that, instead of being troubled by the recrudescence of infernal fury, he accepted it as a presage of the mercies of God and the consolations reserved for his own ministry. Often when he rose after a harassed and sleepless night he found complete strangers at his door, who had walked all night and now begged him to hear their confession.

The Spirit of evil did not content himself with knocking at doors and disturbing the repose of M. Vianney by hideous noises ;

he varied his methods with infernal ingenuity. Sometimes he hid himself under the bed, and even under the pillow, emitting piercing cries, heart-rending groans, suppressed whimpers, feeble sighs, or moaning audibly as one in pain, and simulating the rattle in the throat of the dying.

"The devil is very ingenious," said the Curé, in his catechism one day, "but he is not brave—a sign of the Cross puts him to flight. Three nights ago he made a great racket just above my head. It seemed as though every carriage in Lyons was passing through the room. Last night he had a troop with him who banged at my door; they shouted like an army of Austrians; I couldn't understand a word of their jargon, but made the sign of the Cross, and they took themselves off."

One night he woke with a start to find himself being lifted into the air. "Gradually I felt my bed going from under me; I made the sign of the Cross instantly, and the *grappin* let go of me."

Another night the devil took the form of a delightful cushion, into which the head of the poor Curé sank voluptuously as into soft wool; at the same moment a plaintive sigh issued from it. This time the Curé owned he was really alarmed; for it seemed to him that this new device was a snare for his soul. He invoked the assistance of heaven, and the illusion was dispelled.

Having been invited to Montmerle, after the mission at St. Trivier, the devil followed him thither; and as he seemed likely to effect a great deal of good, the Evil One set himself to do as much harm as he could; consequently he molested him relentlessly and in his best style. From the very first night he dragged him round the room in his bed, so that sleep was out of the question. Next morning M. Vianney repaired early to the church, according to custom, and found a crowd round his confessional. Hardly had he sat down than he felt himself lifted up and tossed as though he had been some frail bark on a rough sea.

He often mentioned this occurrence; and the first time that the Abbé Toccanier, then Vicaire of Montmerle, met the holy priest, whose friend and companion he afterwards became, M. Vianney said to him: "I gave a mission at your place years ago; and had plenty to do with the *grappin*. He amused himself at night by taking my bed about the room on its casters."

The facts we have just mentioned go to show that impish pranks are not by any means strangers in the kingdom of evil. "Their manifestations," says the learned Görres, "have something indefinable, uncommon, sometimes even noisy and frolicsome, about them. One would think they delight to regard things in a humorous aspect occasionally, and see poor mortals strut and pride themselves on that vain civilisation which, though it refuses to believe, nevertheless trembles; that in their lighter moments they are pleased to descend among them, to egg them on and make fun of them. They are always found to dread those who do not

dally with them. Irony has a certain affinity to the spirit of evil, for there is something distorted and unpleasing even in the humour of these spirits ; and in their pleasantries we have more than once detected the flash, as it were, of the fire that devours them." (*La Mystique*, part II., bk. V., c. xxiii).

The Curé of Ars gave the following account of diabolic malevolence. When he went to St. Trivier to preach the Jubilee he left home the day before on foot and unaccompanied. As he went along reciting his rosary he found himself enveloped in thick gloom, the air seemed arid, and the bushes appeared to him as if in flames. An illusion of Satan, no doubt, who, foreseeing the happy results likely to accrue from the ensuing mission, accompanied the missionary, encircled by his own devouring element, with the object of terrifying and discouraging him. M. Vianney nevertheless continued his journey, confiding in the protection of the Mother of God and his own guardian angel ; and seeing nothing in this new artifice of the enemy than a portent of the blessing of God on his work. And in effect his stay at St. Trivier was marked by most consoling triumphs of grace.

One of the strangest efforts of the devil, and one that illustrates his ignoble instincts in a remarkable manner, appears in the episode of a picture which continually excited his venom. M. Vianney had on the stair-head, in the same place as it stands to-day, a large painting of the Blessed Virgin, to which he was much attached, although it is a very mediocre work of art. The sight of this picture appealed to his inmost soul by recalling the most chaste, as it is the most divine, of all our mysteries—the Annunciation.

Observing the particular devotion the Curé evinced for this picture, the wicked *grappin* set to work to befoul it every day with filth of all sorts. \ It would be thoroughly cleaned, but next day it would appear worse than the day before. These contemptible insults continued until M. Vianney, preferring to be deprived of the consolation he derived from the picture, had it removed.

Many have been witnesses of this odious profanation, and some have been able to detect the visible traces of it. M. Renard says he has seen the picture in its soiled condition, the countenance of our Lady being unrecognisable.

This last event should find a place among those in which there is no room for doubt. We have heard M. Vianney allude to it in public ; and among his hearers is no one who does not know the details by heart.

We should never finish, were we to recount at full length the tale of persecution that M. Vianney endured throughout his career. There were few subjects on which he was more communicative than this. He made not the slightest difficulty in answering the numberless questions addressed to him in this connexion ; sometimes he did not wait to be asked, but would narrate in his amiable and humorous style his latest adventure with the *grappin*.

"Monsieur le Curé," said his missionaries to him, "the devil leaves us quiet enough. We have lived near you for a long time; we see nothing, we hear nothing; apparently the devil thinks we are not worth troubling about." "Ah!" replied he, "that is because you are really good men." "And these noises, these voices that you hear at night; all this hubbub, does it not terrify you?" "Oh! no, I know it is the *grappin*, and that is enough for me. During the time we have forgathered we have got to know each other; we are comrades . . . Besides which, the good God is better than the devil is wicked; it is He who guards me. Whom God guards is well guarded."

How many times during that brief visit of an hour after noon, in which we were permitted to view his sanctity from close to, has M. Vianney gaily remarked to my colleagues and myself: "To-day the *grappin* came to scratch at my door; he would not let me sleep . . ." or; "To-day he was very angry; which is a good sign. He panted like a bull . . ." And so saying, M. le Curé imitated the heavy and laboured respiration of the *grappin*.

Towards the end of his life these onslaughts of the devil became less continuous and less violent—the last efforts of an enemy who is about to withdraw his forces in despair, the confused voices of which grow fainter and lose themselves in the distance. The prince of darkness hardly appeared at night; contenting himself with disturbing the brief rest that the Curé took after his meal, and of which he stood much in need. At these times he would serenade the Curé from the passage, counterfeiting in turn the growling of bears, the howling of wolves, the barking of dogs; and then call in an insolent tone: "Vianney! Vianney! come along!" thus giving him to understand that numerous penitents were waiting for him. For the last six months of the life of the Curé of Ars these diabolic visitations ceased entirely.

The holy man has often confessed to us, at one time or another, the annoyance he felt when the devil took a valuable holy-water stoup that hung by the head of his bed and smashed it to pieces before his eyes.

Later a statue of St. Philomena was placed in one of the lower rooms of the presbytery, to be blessed by the Curé before being despatched to a parish in Auvergne—where it was to be erected in gratitude for the benefits received at the intercession of the Saint. The day the benediction took place M. Vianney said to the missionary and other persons present: "During the whole time St. Philomena was here the devil did his best . . . that statue worried him; he did what he could, but he found his match."

After this recital of prodigies, supported by an imposing weight of evidence, one has less difficulty in believing that the burning of M. Vianney's bed, three years before his death, was the work of the devil himself.*

*Görres, in his *Mystique diabolique*, cites several instances of diabolic incendiarism.

Here then, are the naked facts ; and in this case I have only to recall my own personal recollections—for I was present. Several months of close intimacy with M. Vianney had put me in a position to learn much that was afterwards to enter into the composition of this work.*

One morning at Shrovetide, when the devotion of the Forty Hours was observed at Ars for the first time, the multitude was enormous, and the work of God in souls more profound and manifest than ever. Leaving my house to go to the church very early, I was met on the door-step by a smell of burning so strong and pungent that it almost upset me. I crossed the square rapidly. Holy Mass, catechism, and some few confessions, detained me till nearly seven o'clock. When I had finished I found the entire village assembled in front of the presbytery. I should have imagined that something dreadful had happened, had I not noticed that the general expression was one of amusement. They laughed, joked, and bawled questions across the square ; and the words " bed " and "*grappin* " were all I could make out amid the din.

" What's the matter ? " I asked, as I approached one of the groups. " What ! don't you know that the devil set fire to M. le Curé's bed during the night ? But come and see ; come and see ! " I looked, and through the half-opened door of the courtyard saw several men carrying some charred and half-consumed débris. Going in, I went straight to M. Vianney's room and found everything in disorder amid the traces of a hardly-extinguished fire. The bed, tester, and everything near—some pictures which owed their value to the devotion of the servant of God, some old paintings on glass that he set some store by, and of which he had said to us only a day or two previously that " his good saints " were the only things in the world he was at all attached to, and would not consent to sell because he wanted to leave them as a legacy to the missionaries—everything had been consumed. The fire had only halted in front of the reliquary of St. Philomena ; and from that point had drawn a line from top to bottom with mathematical precision, destroying everything on this side of the holy relic, and sparing all on the other. As the fire had arisen without visible cause, so it died out in the same way ; and it is very remarkable and in a sense miraculous that the flames from the heavy serge curtains had not spread to the dried-up and smoked wooden flooring, which would have blazed like so much straw. There was another fact, even more remarkable, in that M. le Curé, who was in the midst of all the confusion, did not seem so much as to perceive it. He met the men carrying out the remains of his ruined belongings without asking a question. I found him in the sacristy, and said a few words about the occurrence which had thrown the whole village into a state of excitement. He made

* M. Monnin was for some time one of the assistant-priests at Ars.

a face, accompanied by a gesture of indifference. It was only after his Mass, while he was putting his signature to some pictures, that he suddenly stopped. I can see him now, his pen raised and his sweet penetrating gaze fixed on me. "For a long time have I asked this grace of the good God; He has heard me at last . . . I think that now I really am the poorest man in the parish; everyone else has a bed, and I—thanks be to God—have one no longer." And without another word he went on signing the pictures that the people had brought to him.

"Poor M. le Curé!" said I, in a tone which he mistook for pity; but which expressed only admiration. "Oh!" replied he, "there is less evil in that than in the smallest venial sin." Once before he had said the same, in circumstances which will be told later.

When he came to see me at noon we discussed the events of the night a little more at length. I said that they were generally regarded as a bad joke on the part of the devil; and asked him if he really thought the evil spirit had intended mischief. He replied very positively, but with the greatest composure: "Oh! my friend, it is very plain! Not being able to burn the man, he wished to have the satisfaction of burning his bed . . . He is very angry," added he, "which is a good sign; we shall soon have plenty of money and many sinners."

Then it was that he made the profound and beautiful reflection: "The devil is never more disgusted than when he sees this same money, of which he makes use to corrupt and ruin souls, diverted to secure their salvation." And in truth, during the week M. Vianney received large sums of money for his mission-work; and there was an extraordinary movement towards Ars, which lasted several days.

He spoke to me also of the Forty Hours, and the benefits of that holy institution; and of the joys that the visible presence of the Blessed Eucharist added to the ordinary charms of the pilgrimage. His eyes were full of tears, and his soul overflowed into his words as he said: "There is another kind of flame, and yet another fire . . . ! it is the fire of love."

One is tempted to ask whether the devil ever appeared in visible form to trouble his victim, and under what shape? We can only give two facts. At three o'clock one morning M. Vianney saw a huge black dog with flaming eyes and bristling hair tearing at the ground in the cemetery, where the body of a man who had died without confession had been laid a few days before. This spectacle shocked him exceedingly. We read in the legends of St. Stanislaus Kostka that during the illness which followed on his mortifications the angelic youth saw the devil under the form of a horrible dog, prepared to spring upon him. This terrible vision was repeated three times, and as often banished by the sign of the Cross.

M. Vianney has also related that the devil had appeared to

him under the form of bats, which filled his room and fluttered round his bed—the walls were black with them.

One other question will doubtless occur to the reader. Was the Curé of Ars the only person who heard these noises ; or was there any other direct witness of these supernatural manifestations? It is true that instances of such are not very numerous. But there are some sufficiently remarkable cases besides those already mentioned.

In 1829, at the very height of the persecution, a young priest of the diocese of Lyons—a son of the good widow of Écully, whose acquaintance we have already made—the Abbé Bibost, came to Ars to make a retreat under the direction of the man of God. M. Vianney, who had guided his first steps towards the priesthood, received him with extreme kindness and invited him to stay at the presbytery. “I knew this priest particularly well” (says the Abbé Renard), “and Providence arranged that his stay at Ars should coincide with a visit I made there myself. From the very first our conversation turned on the extraordinary events then passing at Ars, the rumours of which pervaded the entire countryside : ‘You live at the presbytery,’ said I, ‘Well then, you can give me news of the devil. Is it true that he makes noises there? Have you ever heard him?’ ‘Yes,’ replied he, ‘I hear him every night. He has a harsh and shrill voice, that reminds one of the call of a stag. He takes hold of M. le Curé’s curtains, and shakes them violently. He calls him by his name ; three times have I distinctly caught the words : “Vianney ! Vianney ! what are you doing there ? Get out ! Get out !”’ ‘Don’t these noises and cries frighten you?’ ‘Not precisely, I am not timorous ; and besides, the presence of M. Vianney reassures me. I commend myself to my guardian angel, and manage to get to sleep. But I sincerely pity the poor Curé ; I should not like to live with him always. As I am only a visitor here, with the help of God I shall come through safely.’ ‘Have you questioned the Curé on the matter at all?’ ‘No ; I have thought of doing so several times ; but the fear of giving him pain has restrained me. Poor Curé ! poor holy man ! how can he live in the midst of such an uproar ?’”

In 1842 an old soldier, at that time attached to a brigade of our departmental gendarmerie, came to Ars. This good man had risen at midnight and, in company with a group of the faithful was waiting at the door of the church for the arrival of M. Vianney. As the holy Curé did not appear at once, the man had felt the desire of being alone, and in order to keep himself awake walked up and down in front of the presbytery. He was sorrowful from his recent troubles ; and possessed with a vague feeling of disquiet and religious terror, for which he could not account. This feeling drew him towards God, but he hesitated about making his confession. Truth drew him on and induced fear—many a soul has had

the same experience—but to make him take the decisive step a more powerful force was necessary than that of his own thoughts deepened by the silence of the night.

Suddenly he is aroused from his reverie by a strange noise that seems to come from the presbytery window. He listens . . . a voice, strong, shrill, strident, strikes upon his ear ; and several times repeats distinctly : “ Vianney ! Vianney ! Come ! Come ! ” This cry freezes him with horror. He draws back in great agitation. At that moment the great clock in the tower strikes one. Immediately M. le Curé appears with a light in his hand. He finds the man still much agitated, reassures him, takes him to the church, and, before asking a single question or hearing a word of his story, stupefies him by saying : “ My friend, you are in great distress ; you have just lost your wife in her confinement. But have confidence ; the good God will come to your assistance . . . You must put your conscience in order ; and then you will arrange your temporal affairs more easily.”

“ I made no attempt to resist,” said the gendarme ; “ but fell on my knees like a child and began my confession. In my distress I could hardly collect my thoughts ; but the good Curé helped me. He penetrated to the depths of my soul ; he reminded me of things of which he could have had no natural knowledge. I did not think that anyone could possibly read hearts like this ! and it astonished me beyond all expression.”

At the *Providence*, according to the evidence of Catherine and others we have questioned, the sound of footsteps has been heard on the stairs and in the dormitories at night. Search after search was made, but nothing was ever discovered.

In 1857 one of the Ars missionaries who was sick and too much racked by pain to sleep, heard violent blows resound on the wall of his apartment—and from a locality the opposite side of which was inaccessible. The Sister who attended him heard the same thing.

Among the burdened souls who found relief at Ars we know of two who, the night before they made their confession, were disturbed by horrible noises, blows on the door and walls.

We omit many other well-authenticated details, in order not to prolong this chapter—already somewhat full—beyond all bounds. But it would be incomplete were we to leave unnoticed the cases of several who came to Ars at one time and another presenting more or less signs of possession. Of these unhappy persons, two—a man and a woman—are well-known at Ars ; they have frequently appeared there, and generally found at the hands of M. Vianney some relief and comfort in a state as extraordinary as terrible.

For reasons founded on humility and prudence, M. Vianney did not commit himself to the practice of exorcism, but dealt with them in the confessional ; one, as if the possession was only

bodily ; the other, as if it extended to body and soul. In their most violent moments we have seen them calmed instantaneously under the word and benediction of the holy priest of Jesus Christ. My colleagues and myself have assisted at scenes at the very least remarkable. We could relate marvellous things we have witnessed, if they had any direct bearing on our present subject ; and if their relation would not imply a pretension on our part to solve questions we cannot and will not attempt to solve in default of the necessary light and authority. But we cannot refrain from reproducing an extract from an authentic manuscript, bearing all the marks of veracity, under the title of a dialogue between the Curé of Ars and a possessed person—a woman—from the neighbourhood of Puy-en-Velay. This dialogue took place on the afternoon of 23rd January, 1840, in the chapel of St. John the Baptist, eight witnesses being present. The following was made from the dictation of M. Vianney :—

THE POSSESSED : I am immortal.

THE CURÉ : Then you are the only person who will not die.

THE POSSESSED : I have only committed one sin in my life, and I will share the knowledge of it with anyone who wants it. Raise thy hand, and absolve me ! Thou hast often done so before in my behalf.

THE CURÉ (*in Latin*) : *Tu quis es ?* (Who art thou ?)

THE POSSESSED (*also in Latin*) : *Magister Caput* (The Master, the Chief). (*and continuing in a sort of diabolic French*) : Vile black toad, how thou hast made me suffer ! . . . We are mutually at war ; it is a case of which shall conquer the other. But although thou gettest them into thine own hands, it happens occasionally that thou workest for me : thou dost imagine they are properly disposed, and they are not . . . Why dost thou examine the conscience of thy penitents ? Of what good are all these inquiries ? Can it be that what I have made them do does not suffice thee ?

THE CURÉ : Thou sayest that I examine the consciences of my penitents ? But they have recourse to God before they make their own examen.

THE POSSESSED : Yes, with their lips. I tell thee that it is I who make their examen. I am oftener in thy chapel than thou wottest ; my body may leave, but my spirit remains . . . I am pleased when they prate there . . . By no means all who come there are saved . . . Thou art a miser !

THE CURÉ : I can hardly be a miser. I have but little ; and that little I give away willingly.

THE POSSESSED : That is not the avarice of which I speak. Thou art avaricious of souls ; thou dost wrest from me all that thou canst ; but I will do my best to recover

them . . . Thou art a liar! Long since hast thou said that thou wouldest depart, and yet thou art still here. What dost thou want here then? So many others retire and take their ease! Why not do as they do? Thou hast laboured full long enough. Thou didst wish to go to Lyons. (This was true enough. At the time referred to M. Vianney often dreamed of Fourvières). At Lyons thou wouldest be as avaricious as here. Thou didst desire to withdraw into solitude. (This was also true; he had been torn between the two ideas—retreat to Fourvières or La Trappe.) Why dost thou not do it?

THE CURÉ: Hast thou anything more to reproach me with?

THE POSSESSED: I troubled thee sufficiently during Mass last Sunday. Ah! dost thou not remember? (The Sunday in question was the Second after the Epiphany. The Curé of Ars had declared that he had felt troubled in an extraordinary degree up to the Gospel). Thy *purple cassock* (Mgr. Raymond Devie, Bishop of Belley) has recently written to thee. But I have managed so well that he has omitted an essential matter; that which has disturbed him most. (M. Vianney had in fact received a letter from his Bishop that day).

THE CURÉ: Will Monseigneur permit me to go?

THE POSSESSED: He values thee too much! Without that——(here the possessed designated our Blessed Lady by a name that cannot even be hinted at) thou wouldest be gone already. We have done all we could to get thy *purple cassock* to pack thee off, and we have not succeeded because of——(our Lady). Thy *purple cassock* as avaricious as thyself: he has caused me just as much suffering. No matter! we have lulled him into security concerning an abuse in his diocese . . . Come then! raise thy hand over me, as thou dost over so many others. Thou thinkest to convert all: there thou dost err. Things look well just now, but I will retrieve the situation presently. I have sundry of thy parishioners on my books.

THE CURÉ: What thinkest thou of A. B.? (a priest of tried virtue).

THE POSSESSED: I like him not! (*These words were uttered in a tone of concentrated rage, accompanied by horrible grinding of teeth*).

THE CURÉ: And of C. D.?

THE POSSESSED: A good man that! He lets us do very much as we please. There are black toads who do not cause me as much suffering as thou. I serve their Mass. They say it for me . . .

THE CURÉ: Dost thou serve mine?

THE POSSESSED: Thou dost weary me! . . . Ah! if that—(our Lady) did not protect thee! . . . But wait a while! we have ruined stronger than thee . . . thou art not dead yet . . . Why dost thou rise so early? Thou dost disobey thy *purple cassock*, who has told thee to take care of thyself . . . What maketh thee preach so simply? Thou dost pass for an ignoramus. Why not preach in the grand style, like they do in the towns? Ah! how those grand sermons delight me, which fluster no one, which leave everybody to go their own way, and do what pleases them! At thy catechisms some there are that sleep; but thy simple words go direct to the hearts of others.

THE CURÉ: What thinkest thou of dancing?

THE POSSESSED: I am round about a dance, just as a wall is round about a garden.

In another case, an unhappy woman who exhibited signs of possession said to M. Vianney: "How thou dost cause me to suffer! . . . If the world held three such as thyself, my kingdom would be destroyed . . . Thou hast snatched more than eighty thousand souls from me." The Curé of Ars, turning to his missionary, said to him: "Do you hear that, Monsieur le Missionnaire? The devil asserts that we have robbed him of twenty thousand souls" . . . The first figure had been pronounced in a very distinct manner; it was only the humility of the holy Curé that made him reduce it by three-quarters. Then, addressing the daughter of the possessed woman: "To-day, you will begin a novena to St. Philomena; and to-morrow bring your mother to the sacristy. I will hear her confession after I have said Mass. At present make her kneel down, and I will give her my blessing." The poor girl besought the servant of God to deliver her mother at once; but he demurred, on the ground that he had no authority.

Next morning, the young woman thought of getting seven men to convey her mother to the church. She assured them that no less a number would suffice to carry out such a difficult undertaking. But they replied: "The holy Curé told you to lead your mother to him: that is quite sufficient; no need of anyone else." And indeed the energumen allowed herself to be led like a lamb, without offering the smallest resistance.

This woman spent ten days at Ars, made a general confession, received Holy Communion, and departed much more calm. She had said, in the presence of several, at a moment when the evil spirit was upon her: "What a foul place is this Ars of yours! how bad it smells! everybody stinks here . . . Give me *La Rotonde* (a well-known haunt of vice in one of the worst parts of Lyons); all is fragrant there—roses, jasmine, violets! . . . " Then addressing the bystanders: "Ah! if the lost could but come to Ars! they would profit more by it than all of you."

Someone asked : " Who is it that makes tables turn ? " She replied : " I do . . . Mesmerism, hypnotism—all that sort of thing—is my business."

These facts, which took place under our observation in all their terrifying reality, will astonish none but those who have habitually lived in ignorance of the inner history of sanctity in the world. The legends in the breviary are full of such. There is hardly a work of hagiography which does not present some traces of the same. There is, in particular, one book, the competence and testimony of which none may doubt unless he is prepared to abjure his faith—the Roman Ritual, the organ of the purest orthodox doctrine, the most authentic monument of tradition. Not only does it affirm the existence of devils on practically every page ; but the deceits of Satan, his tortuous manœuvres, his sinister enterprises for the ruin of mankind, are minutely particularised—we had almost said described. For instance, we read : " I exorcise thee, creature of water . . . that thou mayest become water exorcised for driving away all the power of the enemy, and mayest have strength to uproot and supplant the enemy himself, with his rebel angels . . . " And in the prayer following the priest asks Almighty God that this water " which is used at thy mysteries, may receive the effect of divine grace in casting out devils . . . that whatever in the homes or possessions of the faithful may be sprinkled with this water may be free from all uncleanness and may be delivered from evil. Let no baneful spirit and no corrupting breath abide therein ; let all snares of the hidden enemy depart therefrom ; and whatever imperils the safety or disturbs the peace of those that dwell therein, be banished by the sprinkling of this water . . . "

In the magnificent Preface that the Church chants at the solemn Benediction of the Font on Holy Saturday the divers diabolic operations are clearly denounced. The priest, speaking in the name of the living God, commands every unclean spirit to recede from this water which is to serve for the regeneration of souls. The terms employed are very remarkable. He wills that the whole malice of diabolical deceit be entirely banished (*tota nequitia diabolicæ fraudis absistat*) ; that no power of the enemy may prevail here ; that he may not fly about to lay his snares ; that he may not creep in by his secret artifice ; that he may not corrupt with his infection (*Nihil hic loci habeat contrariæ virtutis admixtio ; non insidiando circumvolet ; non latendo subrepat ; non inficiendo corrumpat*). If there is anything astonishing, it is the inattention with which Christians—while submitting with heart and mind to Holy Church—peruse these formulas, so clear and so positive, without drawing the obvious conclusions.

Now, some may accuse us of outraging the canons of common sense by writing this chapter. Let them judge of matters that belong to the domain of common sense as they will ; but the mat-

ters of which we have just treated belong to another order, and one in which the ordinary rules of common sense are apt to fail. Such matters far transcend the limits of common sense; and, this being so, it is not for the facts to accommodate themselves to common sense, but for common sense to widen its horizon until it includes the facts, and in so doing bring within its purview phenomena which have hitherto escaped it. To meet the extraordinary with a simple denial is, here as elsewhere, a proceeding at once puerile and unphilosophic. And were this to be done in the case of every truth, we could hardly believe the evidence of our own senses any longer.

Once the observer has possessed himself of the facts, and has fulfilled his duty of faithfully examining them, it only remains to accept them as they stand, and consider the conclusion reasonably to be drawn from them. As to the explanation of the facts, it is—as with their acceptance—not a question of things as we think they ought to be, but of things as they really are. To reject the objective reality of these phenomena; to persist in seeing in them nothing but the fantastic creations and vagaries of an excited imagination, on the single pretext that they cannot be anything else, is evidently to consign the exterior world and its laws to the limbo of the impossible. If events so clear and so frequent are nothing more than dreams, what is to hinder us from considering life and all connected with it in the same light.

Whatever may be said, the fact remains that there have been, there are still, and always will be, phenomena that cannot be satisfactorily explained otherwise than by the intervention of a power above and beyond nature. And it is not the least of the proofs of the grandeur of man, that heaven and hell should both endeavour to capture him, and esteem him of sufficient value to enter into a mutual conflict for possession of him.

CHAPTER XXII

HOW M. VIANNEY WAS PERSECUTED BY MEN

You thought evil against me : but God turned it into good, that he might exalt me, as at present you see, and might save many people. (Gen. 1., 20.)

Asked what reward he would have for so great labour, he replied : " That I may suffer and be despised for Thee, Lord ! " (Rom. Brev., lect. St. John of the Cross.)

Nothing but the Cross of my divine Master can give me any pleasure in this world, that is to say, heavy, ignominious, without sweetness, consolation or relief. (St. Margaret Mary Alacoque.)

VIRTUE is not consummate if it does not endure persecution, and thereby receive the hall-mark imprinted by suffering. As the virtue of M. Vianney was not ordinary, so also his sufferings from this source were not ordinary. Contempt, outrage, suspicion, calumny, threats denunciation, all had their turn—sometimes they arrived simultaneously. He came to understand to what lengths hatred and injustice will go ; he was annoyed privately, publicly defamed, harassed even in his sufferings, in the exercise of his zeal, in his works of charity, in the inner sanctuary of the more humble and discreet virtues, without pity for his sweetness or regard for his goodness and simplicity.

When we arrived at this very delicate epoch in the life of the Curé of Ars we had considerable doubt lest we should be diverted from the cool, impartial attitude which alone becomes a historian, and consequently impart a spice of bitterness to this chapter ; but the effort we have necessarily made to understand and appreciate the state of mind of M. Vianney during that stormy time has inspired us with other feelings. And now, happy to be able to look at things from his point of view of faith and charity—which never permit the heart to be soured or the imagination to run riot—we can only commiserate human nature on its incapacity to judge men and matters aright, and praise the eternal wisdom which can turn even the miseries by which His elect are surrounded to their spiritual, and even temporal profit. St. Paul enunciated a profound truth when he said : " And we know that to them that love God all things work together unto good, to such as, according to his purpose, are called to be saints." (Rom. viii., 28).

Who would have thought that a virtue so pure and so modest, a hand so beneficent, supported by so perfect a self-abnegation and such a constant self-forgetfulness, could find traducers ? But it is a matter for still greater astonishment to find that in the first instance these traducers were recruited from the ranks of the clergy. Almighty God so permitted, in order to make it plain that the marvels of Ars were His own doing and that Man

had neither part nor lot in them, since those whose interest would have seemed to lie in fostering a movement towards the regeneration of an entire countryside strove, on the contrary, to stifle it in its inception and hinder it thereafter.

While the fame of M. Vianney increased, carried afar from mouth to mouth, and drew an ever-increasing, ever-more-fascinated, multitude to his feet, his reverend brethren were heard to murmur. Some saw with misgivings that they appeared to be ousted from the direction of souls by a priest, simple and ill instructed, whose talents they had hitherto held in little esteem; they saw in the current that carried their parishioners to Ars an intentional slight to themselves, of which the poor Curé was the cause; and, quite unconsciously no doubt, in their pious solicitude for the direction and salvation of their flock, seized upon it as a specious pretext for occasional bitter criticisms and outbursts of ill-disguised bad humour. No one with any experience of the amount of the "old Adam" that still adheres to the souls of even the least imperfect will be in the least surprised at such susceptibility.

Others there were—and the more numerous—who became alarmed at a development so new and so strange. Unaccustomed to the wonders that sanctity was wont to effect openly in times past, they were bewildered and their understanding failed them; they shook their heads incredulously, and professed doubt as to the effect that the sudden reappearance of a power, long since forgotten and now hardly believed in, might produce on a society at once scoffing and sceptical. These were the discouraging days that followed on the restoration of religion, and no great effort of imagination is required to divine how the wind blew in France at the time.

One thing especially contributed to strengthen these prejudices. Of the strangers that flocked to Ars, some—and a considerable portion of them—belonged to that class of penitent, and more than all of *pénitentes*, whom we shall hear of as very numerous and very persevering round the confessional of M. Vianney, as if their mission in life was to immortalise his patience by their importunity. Poor souls! and much to be pitied, who, refusing to be led by the hand of obedience, seek themselves instead of seeking God; loving Him with all their head in place of loving Him with all their heart, as He wishes to be loved. They dream perhaps of some ideal standard of perfection which shall place them in a choir apart from the ordinary hierarchy of souls; and it may be for the cure, or possibly in chastisement, of a secret pride; but they live a life full of good works, and sometimes sanctified by the practice of eminent virtues, without ever finding peace of mind.

These more or less voluntary victims of a false conscience and a false Christianity carry their incurable malady in pilgrimage

after pilgrimage, from confessor to confessor, as the wind of their instability impels them, sustained by the hope of finding at last, not the word that calms, for unwillingness to be calmed is symptomatic of their disease, but a decision that shall approve their scheme of life, sanction their ideas of perfection, justify their alarms, and allow them to continue to tremble at their own will and pleasure.

Ars speedily became a rendezvous for these unquiet spirits. It is easy to see how the reputation of M. Vianney suffered in consequence; that is, while he was only imperfectly known, and before unmistakable signs of his sanctity had placed him beyond the reach of the carping of the critical and the often indiscriminating vapourings of popular rumour.

On their return home these *habituées* of Ars talked much and at random of the holy Curé; and would make out that he had expressed himself favourably concerning their views. They quoted against their ordinary confessor all that M. Vianney had said, and very much that he had not said; his advice more or less imperfectly understood; his replies more or less loosely interpreted.

And thus it happened that sundry excellent men, from sheer ignorance of the facts, felt constrained to join themselves to the detractors of the holy Curé; and, while acknowledging the uprightness of his intentions, could not forbear questioning the opportuneness of his zeal, the wisdom of his counsels, and the prudence of his methods of direction.

Some curés forbade their parishioners to go to confession at Ars under pain of denial of absolution. Others, more concerned with the danger they thought they saw to the honour of religion and the tranquillity of consciences, esteemed it their duty to raise their voice in the pulpit against this devotee who received penitents from everywhere; and in their Sunday sermons they held forth on the abuses of the pilgrimage then commencing. "In those days," said M. Vianney, with gentle irony, "they let the Gospel rest in the pulpits, and preached everywhere on the poor Curé of Ars."

Those who conducted themselves after this fashion were by no means bad priests; they imagined they were giving glory to God by combatting superstition and protecting the faith against dangerous innovations and unreflecting enthusiasm. As one qualified to speak—the venerable M. Boudon, Archdeacon of Evreux—has well said: "It is thus that persecution on the part of the good who make common cause with the bad, thinking they are doing well the while, prepares the soul of man for the reign of Jesus Christ suffering." But it is none the less true that the higher the quarter from which the attacks proceeded the more heavily they fell on the heart of M. Vianney; and he had need of all his strength of mind not to be crushed beneath the weight of them.

One day, when we talked over this sorrowful period of his life together, we asked him whether all this contradiction had not moved him to the extent of robbing him of his tranquillity. We have never forgotten his admirable reply :—"The Cross," cried he, with a celestial expression on his face, "the Cross make one lose one's peace! Why it is the Cross that brought peace to the world; it is what we ought to carry in our hearts. All our miseries come from not loving it. It is the fear of the Cross that makes crosses heavier. A cross simply carried, and without those promptings of self-love which would exaggerate its pains, is no longer a cross. Suffering borne in peace is no more suffering. We commiserate ourselves when we suffer! but we should do much better if we commiserated ourselves when we do not; because nothing can render us more like our Lord than the carrying of His Cross! . . . Oh! beautiful union of the soul with our Lord Jesus Christ by the love and virtue of His Cross! . . . I do not see how a Christian can be unable to love the Cross, and flee from it! Is it not, at the same time, to flee from Him who was willing to be nailed to, and die upon it for us?"

On another occasion, he said :—

"Contradictions place us at the foot of the Cross, and the Cross at the gate of heaven. To get there we must be trampled upon, vilified, despised, broken . . . The only happiness in this life is that of those who have peace of mind in the midst of the troubles of their daily existence; they taste the joy of the children of God . . . All pains are sweet when endured in union with our Saviour . . . Suffering! what does it matter? It is only for the moment. If we could only spend a week in heaven, we should understand the value of this moment of suffering. We should think no cross too heavy, no trial too bitter . . . The Cross is the present God makes to His friends.

"How beautiful it is to offer oneself in sacrifice to God every morning, and to accept everything in expiation of one's sins! . . . We must ask for love of crosses; then they become sweet. I had some experience of them for four or five years. I was well calumniated, well contradicted—turned upside down in fact. Oh! I had crosses in plenty; more than I could carry almost! I set myself to ask for the love of crosses . . . then I was happy. I said to myself: 'In truth, my only good lies that way!' No need to ask the direction from which they come; they come from God. God always provides us with this means of proving our love for Him."

Animated by such sentiments as these, one can well imagine that the Curé of Ars remained calm in the midst of the storm. Passion of every sort, no matter what we do, is too heavy to be able to soar to those luminous heights from which a saintly soul looks down. The highest human wisdom can only inspire man with a certain amount of patience or a cool serenity; but the

Holy Ghost raises him by the power of His grace to a state of contentment in his trials. M. Vianney accepted his with a holy satisfaction ; and found in them a sweet feeling of restfulness, born of the thought that they were the signs of divine grace to come, and the prelude to those crosses which he regarded as the most certain marks of the greatness of the gifts for which God is preparing us : " Oh ! when the Day of Judgment comes " said he, " how pleased we shall be with our misfortunes, how proud of our humiliations, and how rich by reason of the sacrifices we have made ! "

These trials seemed still better and more precious to him for another reason ; they freed him from the fear that possessed him of being a hypocrite, when he saw himself, so feeble and so miserable, the object of general opprobrium. " At least," he said, to himself ; " I have not deceived everyone. There are still some who see me as I really am, and put me in my proper place. How much I owe them ! for they have helped me to know myself. "

And we must not think that this was a mere form of words. No ; in order to be humble, it is not necessary—as some imagine—to believe oneself to have less knowledge, less intelligence, or less virtue, than one really has ; it is enough that one does not take credit for more than is justified by the facts ; that one recognises who gave them ; and that one sees oneself as God sees us—with very little good and much that is bad. Humility is, before all things, truth.

Then the Curé of Ars was sincere in taking pleasure in hearing his traducers talk of him as he believed himself to be ; and he cherished in his innermost heart the conformity of their opinion with the opinion he had formed of himself. He had that characteristic of true charity which was thus expressed by a saint : " I know that I love my brother ; and should he offend me, I have no reason to love him less on account of it. "

In talking of a person who would have killed him by inches on the slow fire of incessant questioning, had he not been confirmed in patience, he said : " How much gratitude do I not owe her ! Without her I should never have known that I do love God a little. "

One day he received a letter in which he read as follows : " Monsieur le Curé, when a man knows as little theology as you, he ought never to enter a confessional . . . " The rest was to the same effect. And this man who could never find time to answer any of the letters which poured in upon him every day, and which incessantly appealed to his wisdom, his experience, his sanctity, could not conceal the joy he felt at being at last *treated as he deserved*. He took a pen and answered this letter at once : " How much cause have I to love you, my dear and venerated colleague. (The original writer was a priest ; he made amends by coming soon after to throw himself at the feet of the

Curé of Ars). You are the only person who really knows me. Since you are so good and charitable as to take an interest in my poor soul, help me to obtain the grace I have asked for so long—that of being replaced in a post which I am unworthy to fill on account of my ignorance—so that I may be enabled to retire into some corner, there to weep over my poor life . . . How much penance have I to do ! how many tears to shed !”

One is mute in the presence of a humility so profound and so real. Irony herself could have done nothing better. But irony is rebellious self-love ; while justice, who knows her own nothingness, accuses herself with touching sincerity—it is the triumph of grace and the apex of virtue. Excellent Curé of Ars ! he was both. What praise could ever do justice to these few simple lines, written in the sincerity of his heart under the guidance of the Holy Ghost ?

About the same time a meeting of ecclesiastics was held in one of the most considerable parishes. At this gathering, after mature consideration of all the grievances that everyone supposed he had against the Curé of Ars, it was unanimously resolved to apprise the new Bishop of Belley of the unprofitable enterprises and tempestuous zeal of one of his curés, whose ignorance and incapacity should have suggested to him a more discreet and prudent line of conduct. One of those present thought it his duty to acquaint M. Vianney with the result of the proceedings, which he did in a formal letter—a veritable speech for the prosecution, full of unsparing criticism and bitter recrimination.

As this was not the first time that our holy Curé had been threatened with disgrace and the censures of his Bishop, and as he thought nothing of himself, except that he richly deserved them all, he never doubted but that some day would find him driven shamefully from his parish—in his own words : “ I expected momentarily to be shown out *à coups de bâton*, suspended, and put in prison for the rest of my days. It seemed to me that everybody ought to cry shame on me for having dared to stay so long in a parish where I could be nothing but an obstacle to all good.” One of the copies of the resolution passed by the conference just mentioned fell into his hands. Having added his own signature, he forwarded it to his superiors : “ This time,” said he, “ they are sure to succeed, since they have my own word for all they say.”

Meanwhile, what had the Bishop to say to all this repeated denunciation ?

The See of Belley had just been reconstituted by a recent decree ; and the mitre of St. Anthelm* was worn by a prelate in whom one recognised the virtues and talents of his illustrious predecessors. This is the first time we have met this beloved and imposing personage since the commencement of our history ; and we cannot allow it to pass without adding our tribute of

* St. Anthelm was Bishop of Belley from 1163-78.

admiration and filial gratitude to the memory of the venerated prelate. His was the spirit of Mgr. Camus† and the soul of St. Francis of Sales. Seldom are so much tact and kindness found united to such delicacy and penetration as was his. He excelled in the art of knowing his men, and still more in the art of managing them. Everything he said had been well considered beforehand by a kindly heart ; and one left his presence better satisfied with the disapproval he had expressed than one would have been under showers of compliments from many another. A consummate administrator and an indefatigable pastor, he encouraged all in the diocese by frequent visits, continuous direction, and luminous written instructions. He would overcome prejudices, not by attacking them directly, but by showing himself generous and indulgent towards them while discreetly pointing out their dangers and pit-falls—thus leaving to their victims an appearance of some liberty. Long and profitable experience had shown him that to disengage a man from his own self-love is to deliver him from his most formidable adversary. He was the friend, benefactor, and counsellor of many of his priests, the master and model of them all. Called by God to revive the glory of his little church after long years of humiliation and widowhood, none ever raised over the ruins of the sanctuary, and over the souls committed to his care, a gentler, firmer, or more beneficent hand. That hand never left a wound behind it, unless it be those that charity cures because charity herself has caused them.

Such was Mgr. Devie ; not by any means a man to lend a ready ear to false reports and unrighteous suspicions. He had no sooner set eyes on M. Vianney than he loved him ; loved his simplicity, mortification and poverty. Poor himself ; understanding the perfect life as it has always been understood and practised by the saints ; arrived at a very high degree of union with God ; gifted with an angelic fervour the fire of which continued, by a rare privilege, to burn even in the frosts of age ; he loved the piety of the Curé above everything. He saw nothing exaggerated in it, nothing eccentric or absurd. On every occasion he declared himself on the side of M. Vianney ; and took up his defence with spirit : “ I wish you, gentlemen,” said he one day at a numerous re-union of ecclesiastics, and in a tone that shut the mouths of the scoffers, “ I wish you a little of that folly at which you laugh ; it will do no harm to your wisdom.” On another occasion Mgr. Devie spoke again of the Curé of Ars, and in terms of the most profound veneration. The solemn emphasis with which he uttered each word clearly indicated that a lesson for some of his hearers was intended. He concluded, almost severely, with these words : “ Yes, gentlemen, he is a saint ; a saint whom we should admire and take for our model.”

There remained only the question of zeal and knowledge. Before

† Bishop of Belley, 1609-29.

inquiring into the matter himself, Mgr. Devie caused it to be examined by others. He sent his Vicars-General to Ars; they viewed the servant of God from close to, they saw the work and interrogated the workman. Too humble to justify his conduct, M. Vianney contented himself with showing everything with all the simplicity and candour of which he was capable, and then asking to be permitted to resign his functions and lay down a burden too heavy for his feeble shoulders: "I should like," he repeated, "to find a hole in which to hide myself and weep over my poor sins." This was ever his refrain; he would have feared, by saying a word more, to render himself unworthy to be despised for Jesus Christ; it seemed to him wiser to abandon himself to anything that the goodness of God should permit to happen to him.

Later on Mgr. Devie bound him to submit to the council of the diocese any difficult cases he met with in the course of his ministry—an obligation the Curé of Ars willingly accepted. "He has sent us more than two hundred," added the learned prelate, "and except in two of them—in which I should not have thought exactly the same as he did—his decisions were always correct and his practice irreproachable."

Someone once remarked, in the presence of the Bishop, on the little knowledge of casuistry possessed by M. Vianney: "I don't know whether he is learned," replied he, briskly, "but I know that he is enlightened."

So Mgr. Devie loved the Curé of Ars, and knew how to appreciate him; nor would he countenance the false ideas then current concerning him. By some dispensation of Providence it happened that he never did anything to encourage the works of zeal undertaken by his Curé, and—quite unintentionally—was sometimes even the cause of hindering them. "They have never understood the pilgrimage to Ars," said M. Vianney, to a person whom we will not particularise. "You understand it—a little . . . Nor will they know, until the Day of Judgment, the amount of good that has been wrought in souls." From the lips of a man so trustworthy and so modest such an avowal has its own weight, and should be had in remembrance.

The Curé of Ars, on his part, often manifested the singular esteem he had for his Bishop; notably on one occasion after the death of Mgr. Devie, when, having inherited one of his rochets—which he never wore himself, regarding it as a relic—he wished the Superior of the Missionaries to be vested in it at some ceremony at which he presided; and said to him, in making the offer: "I am astonished that Mgr. Devie works no miracles."

We have found some details of a visit made to Ars by the Bishop of Belley, in 1838, in a letter of the period: "The good Curé did not appear at dinner . . . Monseigneur declared that he would not gainsay him, and that he left him completely at

liberty. He is always full of admiration for him, and never mentions him without profound respect. It is a reciprocal feeling in the two great souls, for the Curé assured us on two successive Sundays that our Bishop is a saint. We are a privileged diocese . . . ”

In this connexion we recall the remark of one whose testimony we shall often quote hereafter. When she saw Mgr. Devie cross the little church of Ars, leaning on the arm of the holy Curé, she said, as she regarded the venerable couple : “ How fit it is that such a man should be the Bishop of the Curé of Ars.”

But to return to our subject. M. Vianney continued to meet the obstacles that met him, the obloquy that was heaped upon him, and the outrages that came so plentifully, with the same gentle and immovable firmness. He understood the secret of that noble independence which places a soul above all human respect, suffering everything in silence, attributing all to his own sins, and replying to everyone in language ever benevolent and respectful. However bitter his sorrows, he accepted them as from the hand of God, offering to drain to the last drop the chalice the dregs of which were not as yet exhausted.

And indeed these trials soon became more sensible. Up to this we have only mentioned the persecution M. Vianney underwent at the hands of his colleagues ; but it was plain to see that, sooner or later, the laity would take their part. And, when the world does take a part, and assumes a high moral tone—this world that usually preaches vice, investing it with new graces and glorifying it under a thousand hypocritical forms—when it suits its purpose to take the severe side, then it becomes really formidable, for it goes to far greater extremes of virtue than does virtue herself—who practises herself what she would have others practise. Hatred is clear-sighted, and there is no doubt about the correctness of its instincts. To our thinking the matter is sufficiently clear ; and something would have been wanting to the sanctity of our Curé, had he not been favoured with the hatred of the world.

The world knows its enemies, who comprise all who testify by their own works that the works of the world are evil. The saints are an eternal protest against the works of the world ; they protest against its vices by their own virtues, against its pride by their own humility, against sensuality by mortification, against luxury by poverty, against weakness and disorder by their strength, heroism, and the other miracles of their sanctity.

This then was the opening of a new species of persecution which arose against M. Vianney. Many made it their business—for the most part people whom he had irritated in some way, by rebuking their vices or exposing their hypocrisy, by frustrating their passions or removing their accomplices—to play the spy upon him in order to find a weak spot. The idle liver turns his

hand to mischief ; and in the present instance turned it against the Curé with implacable malignity. Attacks were even directed against his morals ; he received anonymous letters replete with abuse ; infamous placards were plastered on the walls of the presbytery—that asylum of prayer and penance !

“ Such outrages must have been the work of very wicked men,” we said to him one day, in order to see how far his charity would go. “ Oh ! no,” replied he, with exceeding sweetness, “ they were not wicked ; but they knew me better than others. How pleased I was,” he added, “ to see myself thus trampled under foot by everybody, like mud in the streets ! I said to myself : ‘ Good ! this time your Bishop must deal with you according to your deserts. It is impossible but that he will now expel you with violence.’ And the thought consoled me, and kept my courage up.”

Poor holy man ! his courage must have fallen low indeed, if he could only find relief in the hope of being forcibly ejected ! . . . Nevertheless, we are not drawing on our imagination ; our memory is faithful ; we recall these things as though they had been said yesterday ; and we can still see the natural air and look of evident sincerity with which they were spoken.

We insisted : “ But, Monsieur le Curé, how could they reproach you with a wicked life ? ” “ Alas ! my life has always been a wicked one. I led the same kind of life then that I do now. I have never been good for anything.” And this was said without a suspicion of the testimony he was rendering to himself. For we could judge of the life he was leading—was it not before our eyes ? . . . “ I should be sorry,” he continued, “ if the good God were offended ; but, on the other hand, I rejoice in the Lord for all that He permits to be said against me ; for the condemnations of men are the benedictions of God. I was afraid of being a hypocrite when I saw people inclined to make something of me ; I was quite content when I saw this esteem, so little justified, turned into contempt.”

One day a priest came to ask advice of the servant of God. “ Monsieur le Curé,” said he, “ I am weary of being a target for calumny and persecution ; my patience is exhausted, and I am thinking of retiring. But before doing so, I should like your opinion.” “ My friend,” answered the holy Curé, “ do as I do ; let them say all they have to say. When they have said all there is to say, there will be no more to be said, and they will be silent.”

In reflecting on the nature of these accusations it may possibly occur to some that perhaps M. Vianney, though his views were of the strictest and his conduct without a shadow of reproach, might, in the innocence of his heart and his ignorance of the corruption and malignity of men, and under the incessant pressure of direction, have neglected established precautions. We hasten to dispel this suspicion. None ever had a heart more free, and

therefore better able to conduct affairs without any admixture of human affection. In his eyes that too marked sensibility which some affect towards their director was as prejudicial to the perfection of the soul as it was to external edification. In it he only saw a dangerous snare, a peril to humility, and an obstacle to that sweet and uniform simplicity which seeks only God, without regard to itself or those who conduct it. For him direction was an affair into which no human consideration ever entered, however innocent and well-ordered it might be. Added to this; while he endured with unflagging patience and unruffled suavity the defects, scruples, and caprices of those who came to him habitually, he never indulged them with long confabulations, frequent and useless visits, or any of those investigations which could foster self-love or pander to vanity.

It is within our recollection that he showed himself particularly dry and austere towards Mademoiselle Pignaut, the most devoted and attached of all his penitents. He led her by ways extremely hard, losing no opportunity of breaking her will, mortifying and exercising her in the practice of renunciation in things great and small—so much so that he forbade her to attend his catechisms; and she has been seen, on a certain Holy Thursday, relegated to a part of the church whence she could see neither the Altar of Repose nor the decorations and lights, and what she was more sensible of still, the Sacred Host which hid her much-loved Saviour.

His bearing as a director of penitents was always permeated by the spirit of faith and self-abnegation. What signifies the nature of the vessel containing the medicine of the soul, provided it comes from the hand of God? If the confessor acts without personal interest and purely as a matter of duty, God will more surely be with him and work more efficaciously, for the channel will be clearer to convey his grace without taint of anything else.

It was then, in defiance of all probability that these injurious rumours and detestable suspicions arose against a priest who for six years had set an example of an almost incredible austerity of life. But, independently of the reasons we have already given, may it not have been the very perfection of his virtue that roused the evil passions of his enemies, and disposed the world at large more easily to believe all that was said? The mediocre and ordinary cannot behold without a sort of defiant jealousy those rare and sublime gifts that are the privilege of a few favoured souls. Wrapped up in themselves, and hugging their trifle of virtue to their bosom, very many save their pride from humiliation when they fall by striving to believe that the garb of high sanctity wherewith greater souls than their own are clothed also covers other miseries; and that these greater souls, so strong to all outward appearance, also pay tribute to nature in the shape of secret failings and unavowed weakness. At least that seems what the contempt and afflictions suffered by the saints goes to

prove ; and of it we have a fresh and striking instance in the career of M. Vianney. And so there was a time when priests and laymen, devout and indevout, seemed alike leagued against him. The prejudices of one party had for corollary the outrage and violence of the other.

Nevertheless, nothing interrupted the uniformity of his life and habits, even in the midst of the crusade against him. As a lily continues to flourish amongst thorns, and diffuse its perfume, so he flourished amid the calumnies, accusations, injustice, and bitterness which assailed him on every side, and diffused an odour of patience and humility on all around. Though he might feel the bitterness of it all, no sign escaped him outwardly ; and he appeared just as tranquil, affable, as little anxious for his own fair fame, as approachable and facile as he had ever been.

Never was he heard to be bitter of speech, or seen to be discontented or sad. He practised to the letter what he was so frequently heard to say : " The saints never complain." Nor did he yield to that depression which, in great crises, often deprives people of the whole-heartedness and energy so necessary to acquit themselves well of the duties they are called upon to fulfil. Whatever opposition he encountered in the accomplishment of his pastoral functions in the pulpit or the confessional, he carried them out with the same fidelity and exactitude. When asked how it was that he had contrived to retain his energy of mind and the self-possession required to devote himself to his work with the same application and ardour as before, with the perpetual menace of removal hanging over his head and in the midst of so much cavilling, he replied : " One does much more for God when one does things without pleasure and without inclination for them. It is true that I was daily expecting to be driven from my parish ; but in the meantime I acted as though the idea of my removal had never been mooted."

Here indeed is love for the glory of God—pure, noble, disinterested. Herein we may also discern the wisdom that can live in the present, without regard for external things, and without attempt to forestall the designs of divine Providence. Here is, in short, the essence of true virtue, of which it has been said : " Take from her, give to her ; she is ever the same."

This holy peace which prevails in the souls of the saints amid the miseries and temptations of life is a mystery difficult of comprehension and explanation. It must needs be that, in these times of supreme trial their faith is so vivid as to leave no possible doubt as to the intentions of the Master who chastises ; that their desire for things eternal is so strong as to make them courageously embrace and profit by all graces, bitterness, and griefs that will ensure their possession of them. More than all, the soul must be accustomed to compare the brief duration of all these earthly troubles and the instability of all that happens here below

with the sublime and eternal glory that their patient endurance will obtain for them.

It was to this prodigious degree of humility, self-abnegation, and acquiescence in the divine will that grace had brought the Curé of Ars. And the effect of this grace seems yet more wonderful when the violence and duration of the persecution are considered; and also that his extreme delicacy and sensibility, together with his great diffidence in his own powers, rendered him peculiarly vulnerable to attack. But, in spite of all, never was his spirit higher or more firm than in the days when his will bent under the blows that assailed him. And as his confidence rested on God alone, nought that man could do availed to shake it. This experience of human injustice became but another link between his Creator and himself; giving him renewed vigour to love and serve Almighty God. In proportion as the things of this world failed him, so he found his consolation and peace in the things that belong unto Him who has said: "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a contrite heart: and he will save the humble of spirit." (Ps. xxxiii., 19).

It does not appear that during this time, when the world and the world beneath conspired to afflict him, that he was abandoned by our Lord, as would seem to have happened to other saintly personages—notably Père Surin, of whom M. Boudin tells us that, in the midst of trials of the same kind, it seemed that God was against him too; and after afflicting him through His creatures would also strike with His own hand. On the contrary: "I was never so happy as at that time," said the Curé. "The good God gave me everything I asked." More than that one could never ascertain; but the manner in which he was accustomed to speak of that period of his life lends some authority to the thought that he was favoured by heaven in an especial manner with extraordinary graces. Certain it is that at this time the pilgrimage increased beyond all proportions. The more his sanctity was attacked, the more it stood out in relief. People began to come from all countries—even the most distant—to this *ignoramus*, this visionary, this hypocrite; to disclose the most intimate secrets of their hearts to him, to consult him about the most difficult matters, to commend themselves to his prayers. They vied with each other in their endeavours to be the first to see him, get advice, light, a decision, the promise of a remembrance before our Lord. On his side he has often declared that he obtained from God and man everything he wanted. His great miracles, and his great works, supported by large alms, also date from this time.

After having seen all these clouds gather over the life of our holy Curé, it would be interesting to know by what means God brought the trials to an end, and dispelled the blindness of those who had allowed themselves to be misled; but this direct and

all-powerful action which brings about the triumph of good is not invariably visible ; more often God hides His hand.

We have only to add that all these attacks on the most inoffensive and virtuous of men were made either behind his back or at a distance. It was impossible to insult him to his face ; the touching serenity of his whole bearing forbade that, and the transparent simplicity of his very look gave the lie to suspicions. The number of his admirers increased daily—recruited from among those who went to Ars expressly to rail at and upbraid him. When our enemies are wicked or possessed by passion, one may well despair of seeing hatred extinguished and opposition die away ; but when they are merely upright men devoid of rancour, who have allowed their better judgment to be warped by unjust prejudices, there is always room to hope that the ascendancy of consistent virtue will cause them to reconsider their position from the standpoint of justice and charity. During the eight years the trial lasted M. Vianney was never seen to descend from that sublime degree of resignation which it is only given to saints to arrive at and to maintain. Hardly had they contemplated this spectacle face to face than the detractors of yesterday were transformed into the friends of to-day. The clergy were the most remarkable in this return to a calmer frame of mind. Although a priest may allow himself to be influenced by human passion, he does not resist ascertained truth when it is freed from the shadows of misrepresentation which often overlie it. And thus, all the curés of the neighbourhood, as well as those of the diocese at large, were eventually gained to the man they had traduced. Though they did not present the example of a blind and effusive confidence, they did what was better still—they treated M. Vianney with an enlightened and persevering one. The simple course of events put a natural end to the persecution. Justice was vindicated by the very excess of injustice that had been meted out to the Curé of Ars ; it was the victory promised to humility—that miraculous strength of the weak.

Almighty God only sends trials to effect the death of self ; and when the last traces of human weakness have disappeared, in its happy decease His end is accomplished, and He causes the trials to cease.

CHAPTER XXIII

ILLNESS OF M. VIANNEY AND HIS MIRACULOUS CURE

The eyes of the Lord are upon them that fear him . . . he . . . giveth health and life and blessing. (Ecclus. xxxiv., 19-20.)

Die so often to yourself that, by the honour you thus give to God, the process may take the place of the last sacrifice itself. Induce Him, in this manner, long to preserve the victim. (Letter of M. Olier to M. Dufour.)

M. VIANNEY abandoned himself to such labours and mortifications as might well have exhausted several ordinary lives, and for a long time it had been evident that he was only sustained by a miracle. "They tell me of the wonders that take place here," said a pilgrim to Ars. "I have no doubt that the power of God is as great in the nineteenth century as in the early days of Christianity. I am convinced that the prayers of a holy priest can obtain astonishing, and even miraculous cures; I have no need of them. The great miracle of Ars is the laborious and penitential life of its Curé. That a man can do what he does, and do it every day without relaxation and without exhausting his vitality—that is what is beyond me! In my eyes it is the miracle of miracles." How much testimony of the same kind is at hand to confirm this!

Nevertheless, it seemed that this miracle was now to cease. Several times already the health of M. Vianney had given way and caused serious anxiety. On his arrival at Ars he had paid his tribute to the unhealthiness of the Dombes. Several times he had been visited by the endemic fever which resulted from the dampness of the soil; and he had never completely recovered his strength.

The mystical life gives the soul dominion over the body; by it the powers that place a man at the mercy of things created are weakened, while those that attach him to God become stronger and more active. The soul, in withdrawing herself from the outer world, retires into her own stronghold; and in so doing withdraws from the influence of the currents that bear away with them everything they meet in their course. This complete renovation of life cannot be produced without pain.

"In the ordinary state," says Görres, "the soul and body are interwoven, in such sort that the soul is unable to exert the plenitude of her power; but in the mystical state each of the soul's powers is disengaged from that bodily element which serves as the organ of its external activity; she dominates it instead of being subject to it. Every organ is transported in its turn to a higher plane; it draws nearer to the soul, from the presence of which it acquires a more frail and nervous nature—more delicate



Villard-Vernu, Phot., Ars (Ain).

Presbytery of M. Vianney.

and more ethereal. An unhealthy state of body ensues because, in this life, one cannot ascend to a higher grade than one's own without paying for the privilege by suffering or death." (*Mystique divine*, Bk. III.)

The illnesses of M. Vianney were frequent ; rarely did a year pass without one. He was subject to intestinal pains and continual headaches. Catherine relates that often when she wanted to speak with him he would point to his forehead with an expression of indescribable suffering. These pains frequently supervened.

But at the times when his *poor carcass*, as he called it, suffered most his mind was always free, his expression calm and smiling ; nothing in his manner or conversation betrayed the pain he felt, even when most acute. His constitution was so strong and recuperative that the cure was as sudden as the commencement of the malady had been. At the very moment when he seemed about to succumb he would be revived as by a higher power. In the evening he might be utterly exhausted and worn out ; next morning he was seen to be fresh, nimble, and came and went as though nothing had ailed him.

In September, 1842, he was attacked by inflammation of the lungs. Grave fears were entertained on his account, but they were soon dissipated. "Thanks be to God," wrote someone from Ars, "our holy Curé has not yet done with his miraculous life, and he is 'less dying' now than he was before his late illness, which caused such lively alarm to his parishioners. His preservation is regarded as a very precious favour . . . He will not pray for anything temporal, he says, because people attribute to him the miracles wrought at the intercession of St. Philomena."

M. Vianney's doctor confessed that : "The health of the Curé of Ars causes me no anxiety ; it is cared for by Someone Else, and when I am at the end of my resources this Someone Else takes the matter in hand. At the very moment when we seem about to lose him he suddenly regains his strength, as if by magic."

At the beginning of May, 1843, the multitude was greater than it had ever been before. Alone and without assistance, the servant of God broke down under the weight of his crushing labours. Every evening in this month of Mary he was accustomed to ascend the pulpit and address the faithful there present. On the third day he felt so ill in the middle of his exhortation that he was forced to interrupt it ; he attempted to read, but without success ; then he tried to pray, and voice and strength failed him altogether. With great difficulty he descended and went to bed. A little rest seemed to promise relief, but it was deceptive and the gravest symptoms soon manifested themselves.

The following extracts from letters giving the interesting details of this illness are borrowed from the correspondence of a family which it does not become us to belaud, but of which the

least we can say is that in succeeding Mademoiselle d'Ars they also replaced her in their love of God and the Church, and also in their devotion to M. Vianney.

" Ars, 6th May, 1843.

" . . . Our holy Curé is ill—so ill as to make us think that his crown is ready, and heaven about to open to receive him. I cannot describe the consternation and grief of everyone in the parish. He has now been three days in bed. I was allowed to approach that poor pallet. There I beheld a saint on the cross, his suffering features illuminated by a heavenly calm. He told me he was going to commence his preparation for death. M. des Garets hardly ever leaves him ; the good Curé likes to have him there. He has sufficient influence to persuade him to allow the palliasse, or rather the plank on which he was lying, to be changed for a mattress . . . The doctor thinks the case extremely grave.

" We are very anxious ! . . . I cannot explain what his loss would mean to us. He has been our saint, our angel, our shield, our consolation, our support . . . The whole parish is in tears and prayer. Will these prayers be heard ? . . . "

" Ars, 10th May.

" I am sure you all understand our affliction, and that a holy sympathy unites you to all the prayers and promises that ascend to heaven from here with so many tears and fervent supplications that the goodness of God will turn to us. Nevertheless, I am always afraid lest the battle between our prayers asking for his life and his virtues, which deserve their reward, prove too unequal, and that great joy may be in store for heaven over an outcome that will cause such profound sorrow on earth.

" You can form no idea of the touching and edifying spectacle that this place has unceasingly presented since the holy man was taken ill. Such tears ! such prayers ! The church, which seems empty without him, is constantly filled with a kneeling crowd imploring heaven with all their hearts, in the hope that, even now, all their acts of naïve confidence and affectionate piety may be answered . . . Candles burn before every altar, rosaries are in every hand. At first they were obliged to place guards at the presbytery door to keep out a crowd indiscreetly eager to behold the beloved invalid once more and receive a last blessing. They could only be pacified by being told of the moment when the Saint was raising himself on his bed of pain to give a general benediction.

" It is in truth a most profound and indescribable feeling that has filled all our hearts these last few days. I understand now the grief of the Apostles when the Lord announced that He was about to leave them. It is consoling to be able to assist at these touching manifestations of love and veneration that so exceptional a virtue has inspired. It is a great lesson for my sons, if God will grant me the grace of gravating it deeply in their memo-

ries, so that in the closing years of their lives they can recur in spirit to the sublime moment when, kneeling round the bed of their holy pastor, they saw all that heaven does for its elect even on earth . . . They heard him reply to the interrogatories that are addressed to priests when they are ministered to, by exclamations of love and faith which tell their own story of his life. They have seen him spring up, so to speak, before the God who came to visit him. All these things they have seen ; and it seems to me that I should bless heaven for it, and have good hopes for their future. It is a ray from Thabor that will illuminate their lives ; and also a pang from Calvary which will give them strength, confidence and hope.

"The holy man has read the chapter from Ecclesiastes* on obedience to physicians to such good effect that he displays the most perfect docility to all their behests. To-day some improvement in his condition is announced ; last night was less feverish, less restless. May God help us in this matter !"

Of the two sons mentioned in this letter, Eugene, the eldest, died, consoled and strengthened by the Curé of Ars ; after a long illness in which he edified his family by his angelic patience, his filial submission to the will of God, and the generous sacrifice of a life of only twenty years. The second, Joanny, beloved of God and man, was mortally wounded five months later in the first assault on Sebastopol. He had written home a few days before : "If anything happens to me, you may be assured, and can tell all who know me, that my last thoughts will have been for God and my family . . ." One of his comrades wrote of him : "Always at the post of honour, he had no thought save of his duty, and did it in the best way possible." M. Vianney wept when he heard of his death.

To give some idea of the concern that the condition of the holy Curé inspired in a great number of Christian families far away from Ars we quote the answer to the foregoing letter :—

"In order to satisfy the general interest of everyone here I read your letter yesterday evening at prayer-time. And here, too, you might have seen tears flow and heads bowed under the touching benediction given by the good and holy pastor to his bereaved flock. I understand your affliction, your grief, your prayers ; all find an echo in my own heart. Nevertheless, I dare not ask God to postpone the hour of his reward, to take from that venerable head the crown prepared for it, to withhold for some time longer the palm of triumph from those hands which have so valiantly fought for it . . . It seems to me that the holy man might address to us the sweet reproach of the exiled soul to his mother : 'What have you done, mother ? . . .' Heaven is opening to him, and behold us asking that it may be closed again. In the ecstasy of his pious transports he has seen his place of

*Evidently it is *Ecclesiasticus* ch. xxxviii that is referred to.

glory and happiness ; and we want to recall him to that place of misery and suffering he has occupied here below . . . Already has he exclaimed : ' Lord, it is good to be here ! ' and we would change that cry of love and beatitude into the groan of the royal Prophet : ' Alas ! that my exile is prolonged ! ' Oh ! my child, I have not the heart to do it. I weep with you ; I see with grief the extent of your loss ; it is with pain that I witness the extinction of such a veritable star of virtue, of a piety that shone with so much lustre amid the shadows of death, that supernatural life disengaged from sense and from matter, surrounded by an unbelieving and materialistic world. I deeply deplore the removal of the salutary influence that the wonderful spectacle of his faith and religious ardour exerted, even at a distance. But I own that I dare not ask the prolongation of the laborious days that a happy eternity now claims for herself. I adore the works of God, ever admirable in His saints ; and I have a firm confidence that He will spare him or take him according as his earthly existence or his celestial beatification will be more advantageous to you. If you lose him here below, will you not find him more powerful on high ? Are you not thoroughly convinced that the measure of his charity will expand yet more with his beatitude, and that he will pour out upon you floods of graces and blessings ?

" This persuasion does not hinder me from profoundly sharing your grief, your painful anxiety, nor from uniting myself in admiration and tender sympathy with the crowds that besiege that sanctuary so perfumed with the odour of sanctity, nor from hoping that we also may see him again at the altar—a mediator between heaven and ourselves, offering the (to him) greatest of all sacrifices of his own return to life. Yes, I hope so ! I had feared at first that he was going to be taken from you swiftly. I thought that his strength, sapped by labours and austerities, must succumb to the first shock. But, since the struggle continues, it must be that unsuspected vitality lies hidden in that frail body. Let us hope then : let us hope ! . . . And if heaven takes him from us ; if it claims a treasure which is its own rather than ours, let us praise and bless the Lord ; for ' the voice of rejoicing and of salvation will have been heard in the tabernacles of the just. ' "

" In the retirement of my little parish " (wrote the Abbé Renard) " I very soon learned the news. I left for Ars within an hour. On my arrival I had the happiness of embracing the holy priest, whom I found in such a state of weakness that death seemed imminent. ' Then you wish to leave us, Monsieur le Curé, ' said I, with emotion. ' I shall leave you my body ; my soul will go up there, ' replied he, pointing upwards with his feeble hand. There was something sublime in his expression and gesture that cannot be described, and moved me profoundly. I could say no more ; but went out with a very full heart.

" A mournful silence reigned throughout the village. Conster-

nation was depicted on the face of everybody ; there might have been a death in each house. The pilgrims wandered about the public square and round the church like sheep without a shepherd ; all eyes were turned towards the presbytery to catch the smallest sign and take note of the slightest incident. Immediately the nurses appeared they were surrounded and anxiously questioned : ' How is the holy Curé ? How is the good Father ? ' Some two or three hundred there were who had not finished the confessions they had begun to make to M. Vianney. At the reply that he was no better, they flocked to the church again and redoubled their prayers and tears, trying to do violence to heaven, and obtain from the Lord, by the intercession of our Lady and St. Philomena, the restoration of a health so precious to all.

" I ought not to omit a circumstance that made a lively impression on me. During the fortnight I spent at Ars I made a daily visit to the holy patient. I was always received with the same kindness whatever his sufferings might be. One day I was leaving more sorrowful than usual, for the situation appeared to me to be quite hopeless, when I was met in the courtyard by a weeping woman. ' The holy Curé is dying, then ! we shall never see him any more ! Oh ! Monsieur, how unhappy I am ! I began to make a long confession to him. What am I to do now ? ' ' You must go to the priest who is supplying for him. ' ' I have not the courage to commence again . . . Allow me to kneel on the threshold of his room, so that he may see me and give me his blessing . . . ' "

Similar scenes were repeated a hundred times in the day, and ended by fatiguing the saintly patient, who, having exhausted his powers of actual speech, still endeavoured to understand and be understood by those who visited him. But these efforts were killing him. And so M. Renard adds that, to his great regret, he could not infringe the strict orders of the doctors in favour of this woman.

On the fifth day there was a consultation. From the actual symptoms, as well as from those that had gone before, it was evident that the illness was pleuro-pneumonia. The persistence and violence of fever made them apprehensive of delirium. They forbade all conversation with the patient, under pain of the utmost risk, and enjoined on his attendants the necessity of avoiding anything that might excite emotion.

And in effect the venerable Curé showed continual signs of increasing weakness ; and his confessor, the Abbé Valentin, Curé of Jassans, thought the danger so grave as to call for the administration of the Last Sacraments. It so happened that there were no less than seven ecclesiastics in the house ; and they agreed that no one else should be present, while, to avoid increasing the general anxiety in the village, the church bell should not be rung.

But the saintly invalid overheard their conversation and, turning to one who was with him, said, energetically : " Go and

tell them to ring ; is it not becoming that the parishioners should pray for their Curé ?”

The bell had scarcely sounded before the entire village was on foot. Everyone would have desired to escort the Holy Viaticum to the sick-room, hear the last words of their pastor, receive his final benediction, take one more look at his venerated countenance, and witness the love and joy with which he received his divine Master ; but this favour was only accorded to a few privileged individuals. The crowd remained kneeling on the stairs, in the courtyard, and outside in the square, praying and weeping.

The customary questions were put to M. Vianney—whether he believed all the truths of our holy religion ? “I have never doubted them,” he replied. Whether he pardoned his enemies ? “I have never, by the grace of God, wished evil to anyone.”

The day after this imposing ceremony the Curé of Fareins celebrated Mass at the altar of St. Philomena. At that moment the sick man, who had been feverish up to now, fell into a peaceful sleep for the first time. “I do not know what passed,” says Catherine, “but ever since then he progressed from better to better still, until he completely recovered.” The voice of the village—less discreet than Catherine—claimed to know what happened . . . the general opinion was that St. Philomena appeared to the servant of God and, holding mysterious colloquy with him, communicated things which were his consolation to the end of his life.

This is what M. Pertinant, the village schoolmaster, who had been at the bedside day and night, had to say on the matter :—

“M. Vianney, seeing himself reduced to the last extremity, asked that a Mass might be said in honour of St. Philomena, to whom he had consecrated himself by a special vow. The priest of a neighbouring parish was asked to say it, and everybody in Ars, visitors and residents alike, assisted. Before the Holy Sacrifice began, M. le Curé appeared to me like one who is afraid of something. I noticed something extraordinary, a great anxiety, he seemed to be unusually troubled. I watched every movement, thinking that the fatal hour was come and that he was about to breathe his last. But when the priest was at the altar he became suddenly tranquil. He was like a man who beholds something pleasant and reassuring. The Mass was hardly ended when he cried : ‘My friend, a great change has come over me . . . I am cured ! . . .’ Great was my joy at these words.

“I am convinced that M. Vianney had just had a vision, for I heard him murmur the name of his beloved patroness several times, which gave me to understand that St. Philomena had appeared to him ; but I dared not ask any questions.”

We believe, like everyone else, that this cure was a miracle of the divine goodness. And for whom should the heavenly physician exert His powers of healing, if not in favour of those who only ask

the restoration of their health in order to be better able to serve Him? From that hour the Curé of Ars entered upon his convalescence, and his strength rapidly returned to him, as the following letter shows :—

“Ars, 14th May.

—“I write to give you news of our holy Curé. Two days ago the doctors found him much better; and this third morning confirms the glad tidings. We are rejoicing the more as we had not dared to hope for such good fortune. We thank God for it from the bottom of our hearts. If you could only have seen the desolation into which the entire parish was plunged! . . . had you but heard the echo of the sobs and sighs with which the little church of Ars has resounded these last ten days, you would understand how greatly we are moved. When the death of M. le Curé was expected they asked him to bless basketfuls of medals, rosaries, crosses and images . . .

“The venerable convalescent is docility itself; he takes everything he ought to take—yesterday indeed, he was inclined to refuse his chicken-broth; but his confessor came in and scolded him, when he took it without another word.

“The other day, when he saw the whole faculty of medicine round his bed, he laughed and said: ‘I am engaged in a great struggle just now.’ ‘And with whom, Monsieur le Curé?’ ‘With four physicians.’ If a fifth one arrive on the scene, there is no hope for me.’”

“I had three or four doctors,” said the Curé of Ars, later, in his catechism, wishing to show how frail a thing is life, and how feeble and helpless are the efforts of human science against the mysterious decree which has pronounced its term, “I had three or four doctors, who regarded me as doomed.”

The next few days witnessed a great improvement in the state of the convalescent, as a letter of 17th May attests :—

“The invigorating influence of the weather should be very helpful to our holy convalescent just now. Nevertheless, his strength recuperates in a fashion his medical attendants describe as marvellous: ‘Say miraculous,’ as he interjected. He attributes his recovery of the intercession of St. Philomena. He said, very graciously to the doctors: ‘You are the means of which God has made use to cure me,’ and he often speaks of the care they have bestowed upon him. He is unceasing in the expression of his lively gratitude for all the affection of which he has been the object, and of which he has received such touching proofs. I saw him yesterday; he is not thinner or more emaciated than he was before his illness. Perhaps his features bear even less marks of suffering than they did. All his conversation shows his eagerness to regain his strength as quickly as possible. But what will he do with the life of which he has asked the extension? . . . How is he going to employ that strength which has been renewed at

his own request? . . . These are the questions that occupy everyone here with a sort of vague misgiving. We are dreading to lose by departure the man whose life heaven has granted to our prayers; and the joy at his recovery is much damped by our painful apprehensions. The poor *Saint* has an ardent desire to go to breathe his native air once again, knowing only too well that all the reverence and affection which surrounds him here will not permit him to take the rest of which he stands so much in need.

"In truth, the holy man wrings the hearts of his flock in every conceivable manner; and kindly as we have ever known him to be, I cannot believe that he will ever bring himself to leave us orphans. He speaks of his flock with the tenderness of a father, and yesterday he said to us: 'There is still plenty of faith left. I was very much touched to see the grey-heads of my parish bent over my bed to receive my blessing.' The demonstrations of affection continue to overwhelm him. We almost want guards to stay the pious attentions of parishioners and others. We pray, praise and bless continually; more than all we ask that the beloved pastor may be kept in the parish . . ."

The Bishop of Belley had been informed of the illness of the Curé of Ars by the good people at the château. He replied through his Vicar-General:—

"Monsieur le Comte,

"It would be very difficult to express the sorrow of Monseigneur and myself on learning of the gravity of M. Vianney's illness. Indeed, for some minutes we dared not open your second letter, fearing to find in it the news of a death precious in the sight of God, but which would have carried consternation to all those who venerated our holy Curé, and who know the good he does for souls. The Lord is Master of life and death; and if He wills to gather for heaven a fruit ripe long since, we must submit to His designs. But I understand how sad the separation of pastor and people will be.

"In case of his death, may I ask you to be so kind as to keep for us some few articles which our *Saint* has used?"

M. des Garets, Maire of Ars, wrote thus to the Vicar-General:—

"My last letter will have told you of the improvement in the condition of our beloved invalid. Since that time the improvement has been maintained and consolidated.

"Convalescence is commencing in a more satisfactory manner than we had ventured to hope after so grave an illness. The doctor who visited him yesterday departed very well satisfied. Nothing ails now except the excessive weakness, and that we may hope to overcome with prudence and care. The *Saint* is very docile, and most anxious to do everything that may conduce to the re-establishment of his health. Nor does he complain at

our strictness in warding off all that may fatigue or compel him to talk. The doctors have insisted on almost complete seclusion ; and they are quite right. If one opened the door to everyone who wishes to speak to him, he would not have a moment's rest—and rest is absolutely essential to him. I am carrying out the orders of the medical men as exactly as possible, in the face of a crowd of parishioners and others who ask with tears to be allowed the happiness of seeing their much-loved pastor for a minute or so, to express the joy his recovery has caused them. There is always someone with him, either to attend to his wants or to ask him to bless articles that the piety of the pilgrims leads them to present to him for the purpose.

"It is quite impossible to describe to you, Sir, the sympathy and devotion of his colleagues, his parishioners, and even of entire strangers. Words fail in which to depict such beautiful homage to virtue. Never has any public calamity here been so universally felt, even by those whom one would have suspected of indifference. This concern was specially noticeable in sundry strangers who, when they arrived at Ars, thought that M. Vianney was dead . . .

"I ought to mention that, since the beginning of his illness, our holy Curé has manifested a desire to go to spend a few days in his native country. I am convinced that he feels the necessity of absolute rest, by which he hopes to re-establish his health more speedily, and thus the sooner be enabled to resume the course of his work. I have not contradicted him in the matter, since I hope his absence will not be prolonged ; but I am endeavouring to postpone the hour of his departure as long as possible, so that he may be the better able to support the fatigue of the journey. At the same time, I am not without hopes that, when he finds himself getting better, he may give up the idea of going. He holds firmly to it just now ; but after what he has said to myself and others, I trust that his absence may not extend beyond a few days ; and that we shall soon see him amongst us once more. It seems to me that the sympathy and devotion that has been evinced towards him ought to banish from his mind any project of separation from his flock."

It can be easily imagined what was the most pressing need of the holy priest when he found himself able to rise and walk a few paces—to whom his first thoughts turned, where his first visit was made, and to what use the first-fruits of his recovered strength was put. It was now sixteen days since he had looked upon the tabernacle, sixteen days since he had ascended to the altar to offer the Holy Sacrifice. This had been to him an incomparable privation, and one to which all his bodily sufferings were as nought.

On Friday, 19th May, he was conducted, or rather carried, to the church, where he fell on his knees before the altar and there seemed to lose himself in sentiments of adoration, gratitude and conformity to the will of the Master who had called upon him to

live and continue his labours. After this visit to our Lord, he went to throw himself at the feet of *his dear little Saint*, where he continued a long time in prayer.

"For a week" (says the good schoolmaster), "I myself led out M. le Curé to the church between midnight and one o'clock. He was so weak that it would have been impossible for him to wait until the morning without food. When he got there the bell gave the signal, and the entire population of Ars hastened to assist at his Mass. Instead of being Ascension-tide, one would have imagined that, for this week, the clock had been put back to Christmas-Eve; and we rejoiced in the Lord at the sight of our venerable Curé, called back from the very gate of heaven which he had been so near entering, to enter upon a fresh lease of life in our midst."

The first Mass celebrated by the holy convalescent was a great event, of which we find some account in a letter of the period:—

" . . . When we arrived in the parish, we had hoped to pay a visit to M. le Curé; but we had to be content with the *petit bonjour* he gave us in a feeble voice and tired withal by a visit to the church, which he has made daily since Friday. He has perhaps presumed a little too much on his returning strength.

"One cannot help repeating oneself if one is to describe the joy and happiness of his flock at beholding him once more restored to their hearts. Several good souls passed the night of Friday-Saturday in acts of thanksgiving; and at three o'clock on the morning of Saturday, the holy Curé, assisted by his good old confessor, celebrated Mass at the altar of the Blessed Virgin.

"It was at that moment that I found myself wishing that you were at my side, and with you all whom I love. They would have contemplated with wonder that countenance on which were reflected the sufferings and sadnesses of earth, illuminated nevertheless by the joys of heaven . . . I should be willing to live for centuries if, during those centuries, I could have before my eyes the vision of this saintly man renewing the sacrifice of the life he had once more received, with resignation and—what places the seal on my admiration for him—with gratitude. He wished, asked for, his cure; of that we have proof certain. He did not regard the measure of his days as full. The thought of the judgments of God filled him with terror. Alas! my God! we might well tremble and be afraid for ourselves, did we not venture to hope for some small share in the superabundant treasures that the holy man may yet amass! . . ."

This first sickness of the Curé of Ars offers a contrast to the second, as we shall hereafter see; in that he had a profound terror of the judgments of God, a lively apprehension of death. "No! my God!" cried he, "not yet! I am not prepared to appear before Thy terrible tribunal . . ."

The joys of Ars at this time resembled the rays of a March sun which shows for an instant between two clouds. The parish became once more light-hearted by reason of the restoration of the man they had thought lost to them ; and they were rejoicing like a miser over his newly-acquired treasure, when suddenly a new cause for alarm appeared. Thus a letter of 26th May :—

“ We are afraid—very much afraid—that our holy Curé will escape us after all ; and that we shall have to mourn him living while we are still rejoicing that we have not to mourn him dead. There is no room for deception on our part ; the holy man thinks he has finished his life’s work. His life has been restored ; and he seems to think that, in restoring it, heaven has given him his liberty—that is what he thinks : that is what he aspires to. The love of his parishioners deeply moves his wonderfully sensitive heart ; it may be that he desires to withdraw himself from an affection which might prove to be for him the gratification of a merely human feeling . . . I do not know ; but what we fear, what alarms the parish almost as much as when he was ill, is the long-concealed desire he entertains of leaving us.

“ Thus our peaceful happiness at the restoration of his life has been of very short duration ; for the Almighty has sent us another trial, and harder to bear than the one of only a few days since. After all, we must even resign ourselves to the loss of a saint if God so wills it. Moses prayed most fervently for the Israelites in the solitudes of Sinai. But I repeat that we can talk of nothing but our fears, and think of nothing except the grief in which his departure will plunge this parish—this parish, so quickened, so exceptional, the scene of a spectacle of edification that ever presents some new phase of interest, and which appeals to the hearts of all in a manner never to be forgotten.

“ It has often been said that we were too proud of our Curé, and that God would punish this pious arrogance : and it is quite true. We should have been better advised to profit more by the grace that was given us, and not to have regarded it as a benefit to which we have a right . . . ”

And on the third day after Pentecost, 6th June :—

“ . . . I have just been to hear the first little discourse of our Curé : ‘ Suffer the little children to come unto me.’ It is these whom the venerable imitator of his Lord called to him on resuming the course of his mission of charity and zeal. Seated in the midst of this infantine and innocent group, he spoke to them in a feeble voice, still tremulous but even more penetrated with unction than before his recent sufferings. He gazed with sweet satisfaction on his auditory, so affectionate and so happy to see and hear him once again. As the messenger of the Holy Ghost the Comforter, he spoke to us of that Holy Spirit who

inflames and enlivens our being, who alone can satisfy the desires of the heart, give peace to the soul and make us happy here below.

"It was, I assure you, a discourse that I would not have exchanged for one of the most magnificent utterances of our famous orators. That voice which should be singing the eternal *Alleluia*, but which is nevertheless still heard amongst us in this land of exile, does it not ever speak a language that has no need to resort to eloquence ?

"Thus has our Curé, this *Saint*, this admirable man, come back to us. In the depths of his humility he has once more bent his back under the burden of his apostolic mission ; seeking to persuade himself that the renunciation of his own will will supply for that preparation for death which was the object of his prayers for repose and liberty. ' Ever since I was eleven years old,' said he, ' I have asked of God that I might live in solitude ; but my prayers have never been answered.' "

CHAPTER XXIV

FIRST FLIGHT OF M. VIANNEY

He will sit solitary and hold his peace. (Lament, iii., 28.)

O blessed solitude ! O sole beatitude !

Thou dost desire to rest in the mountains : No, return to the work that awaits thee in the plains . . . Have charity in thy heart, preach the truth, and thus shalt thou arrive at eternity in which thou shalt find security. (St. Aug. Serm. lxxviii.)

WE have just seen the Curé of Ars manifest the desire of his heart which had followed him throughout his life hitherto ; and we have also seen the apprehensions that this desire awoke in his parishioners. Very soon what had only been a possible misfortune of the future became an accomplished misfortune in the present.

After M. Vianney's recovery the pilgrimage had recommenced with prodigious activity. It seemed as if the multitude wished to indemnify themselves for the absence of their *Saint* by a recrudescence of love and veneration, and by an impatience to see him that became daily less restrained. In every letter written at this time we find references to the movement.

" . . . There are always many strangers, and especially ecclesiastics. M. le Curé is tolerably well. He goes to the church *before midnight* . . .

" I got there this morning during the Mass of a Capuchin Father ; and I heard a woman who seemed about to give up the ghost. I saw a multitude of pilgrims crowd into the sacristy at the risk of suffocation. I saw the holy man come out, paler, thinner and more emaciated than ever. They all thronged round him. A woman showed him her child, whose eyes, covered with a bandage, made their own appeal to his holy compassion. She did not ask in vain. I saw a sweet and tender pity light up the wan features of the man of God. Then they brought to him a poor little girl of twelve, deprived of the use of one of her limbs. A young man—an epileptic—just arrived from Rome, was praying with touching fervour hard by. As I left I saw part of the crowd that has dispossessed us of our own church these last few days, and has hired every conveyance that can be had in Ars and Trévoux. This morning six omnibuses left, to say nothing of private carriages and the people who have made their pilgrimage on foot.

" In truth it is an admirable and very moving spectacle, this concourse which increases without intermission, and will end by getting beyond even the miraculous powers of our poor *Saint*. Entirely devoted to his mission, he sacrifices to it the life that was

only restored to him two months ago. It seemed to me that I was exaggerating when I told you of him and his work ; now I think I did not say enough. The finger of God is admirably evident in this religious movement, for it can be nothing but God they come to seek in this simple and humble man, so entirely destitute of all that can attract and arouse attention . . . ”

Mgr. Devie, having considered the excessive labours to which the Curé of Ars had already succumbed, came to the conclusion that it was time to come to his assistance. To leave a man single-handed to face a work manifestly beyond human strength was to tempt God and ask miracles. The Abbé Raymond, Curé of Savigneux, had several times offered himself to his Bishop, manifesting his desire to be associated with the ministry of the servant of God. Monseigneur, in accepting this offer, and thus giving M. Vianney an assistant so much to his liking in the person of the priest to whom he seemed most attached, thought that it might induce him to abandon his project of retirement ; but it so happened that it had a contrary effect and did but hasten the execution of the scheme. For the Curé of Ars, seeing at his side a priest young and zealous, whom he considered much more able than himself, thought—now that the parish could be left in such capable hands—that he might seek that little unknown corner of earth in which he had long dreamed of hiding *his poor life*.

Of all the characteristics of M. Vianney, the strongest, most enduring, and—considering his vocation—the most extraordinary, was his craving for solitude. The period of his life that he regretted most was that in which, as a little shepherd at the tail of his flock, he frequented the obscure and peaceful vale of *Chante-Merle*. How often have we not seen his face brighten and his eyes fill at that blessed and touching remembrance. “ I was happy when I had only to manage my ass and three sheep. I had not the broken head I have now ; I never have prayed to God so completely at ease. It was like the water of the brook ; that has only to follow its course.”

Without doubt there was something inordinate in this craving, of which the devil duly made use to tempt him away from his work. But the very lengths to which it led him only serve to show its strength. Cœnobite in one aspect of his nature, but apostle in all the others, there was in him a wonderful contrariety from which he suffered during the whole of his long career. He mortified this craving, controlled and resisted it, but it still persisted to the end of his life—an allurements necessitating an unceasing struggle to overcome.

It may be—and who can tell ?—that there was here a secret and adorable design of the divine mercy, which caused the Curé of Ars to endeavour to conquer himself at every moment and trample upon his own will and judgment by sacrificing his inclination to obedience and his pleasure to his duty. In following

his inclination within the limits of his vocation, the means were provided for him to remain a contemplative while leading a life of activity, to make unto himself a solitude within, to carry his own cell with him ; and the continual excursions of his heart into this interior Thebaid were a safeguard against the distracting influences of the multitude in the midst of which the exigencies of his ministry detained him. In no other respect were any of those signs discernible by which human weakness is wont to betray itself. In his case it was neither misanthropy, lassitude, or enfeeblement of body which prompted his desire for retirement, still less disgust at difficulties. In this craving of his heart there was a phase which one who had but imperfectly comprehended the depths of his humility would have found difficulty in understanding. When he dreamed of La Trappe and the desert, it was as much to disembarass others as to liberate himself ; and had he thought that he was really of any use in the world he would have remained constant at his post. But he had a most intense conviction that he was good for nothing but to ruin everything, that he was incapable of saying or doing anything to any good purpose ; and in fact that he was nothing but a useless burden for the Church. So he resolved to end the matter ; and a letter of 13th September informs us :—

“ Our holy Curé has gone away ; he left last night at one o'clock—left to go where ? Nothing is known exactly ; but this is understood too well—that in all likelihood he will not return. Yesterday evening it was said in the village that he was leaving in the morning. We could not believe it, but we have been forced to believe it, for this morning they told us he was not here. He left a letter for M. des Garets in the following terms : ‘ Most respected Benefactor, I have resolved to go and spend a few days with my brother, so that this great concourse of people may diminish somewhat. I wish you a thousand spiritual and temporal blessings in reward of the great charity you have evinced towards me. You and your family will ever have a place in my grateful recollections. My most heartfelt prayers are yours. Say everything that is kind to your excellent father on my behalf.’ ”

Here is Catherine’s account of this mysterious departure :—

“ It was during the night of 11th-12th September that M. Vianney—always anxious to retire and be a curé no longer, but prepare himself for death by penitential exercises—attempted to put into execution the thought by which he has long been haunted ; for I think it has not been a light matter or one of sudden impulse. He had spoken to no one concerning his intentions ; but the evening before, he told us at the *Providence* what he was about to do, enjoining us to secrecy. But, by the permission of God, there was a person from the village at the door who overheard what was said and hastened to repeat it. Hence all

manner of rumours in the village. They came to us for information ; they doubted the truth of what they heard. Nevertheless they set guards to watch the night through. Suddenly, between one and two o'clock a light was seen, also M. le Curé, who left the presbytery by the back door. Some people who were waiting for the opening of the church ran after him. M. le Curé began to run too . . . Some tried to speak to him, others to get him to bless their articles of devotion ; he continued his course without taking any notice of them. Under his arm he carried some linen tied up in a handkerchief, which also contained his little purse. He handed this bundle to a young man who volunteered to accompany him. But as the young man had only his working clothes on, he went back home to tidy himself up a little, and did not overtake M. Vianney until he arrived at his destination. His place was taken by the faithful Pertinant ; and they walked on as far as Dardilly, the home of his brother Francis.

"In the choice of his route M. le Curé did the same as when he deserted ; he tried to hide all traces from anyone who might attempt pursuit ; and instead of going the usual way made a long detour through Neuville and Poleymieux. When he arrived his feet were all bruised and bleeding ; he felt ill and had to be put to bed."

A letter of 16th September completes the story :—

"I have already told you of the flight of our holy Curé the same day as it happened. Since then we have lost the little hope we ventured to entertain, and now there is good reason to think that the gift of God which has been ours for so many years will not be restored to us. The Bishop wishes to keep him in the diocese at any cost ; and will not refuse the request that has been made to assign him some other post than the government of a parish. The poor *Saint* is trying to fly from the crowd and the celebrity that attached to him here. His humility prevents him seeing that he will be beset, no matter where he may go. There would be no repose or solitude for him outside La Trappe or La Grande-Chartreuse. In spite of the interior voice calling him to one or other of these solitudes, we still think he will resist it, for fear of displeasing his Bishop. All I tell you now, except the request to the Bishop, which is only too well confirmed, is mere conjecture ; unhappily I fear these conjectures are only too well-founded.

"Whole pages would be necessary if I were to describe the sudden and nocturnal departure of our *Saint*, his fleeing from the people who pursued him and clung to his robe, imploring a last benediction. His heart was torn at the sight, but he nevertheless fled with a rapidity that his strength was unable to sustain for long. Often he had to sit down breathless by the side of the road. At last, aided by Pertinant and leaning on his staff, he arrived without strength or voice in the midst of his family, after a seven-

hours march. His first care was to send back the good young fellow who had joined him in his flight to *that good M. des Garets, who would certainly be anxious*. But nothing of his plans . . . not a word of explanation. *That good M. des Garets*, consumed with anxiety, and inverting the parable of the good shepherd in search of his sheep, was very soon on the tracks of his pastor. He made a journey of five-and-twenty miles, only to find that M. Vianney had left an hour previously, without saying whither he was going or how long he would be away. You can imagine poor Prosper's (M. des Garets) sorrow. He wrote a letter to him at Dardilly, which the *Saint* ought to find there. I read the copy of it; and if that letter does not shake the determination of the man of God, it cannot do otherwise than increase his affection for the writer."

Here is the letter:—

"Dardilly, 15th September, 1843.

"I have no need to tell you, my dear Curé, how great is my sorrow at not finding you here. I came expressly to see you, and receive your blessing once again. I wanted to speak with you, to tell you of my plans, of the means that I can employ—and which I certainly will employ, if we have the happiness of keeping you at Ars—to remedy the abuses of which you complain. As God refuses me this favour, I must resign myself. All that I ask of you, my dear Curé, and I trust you will not refuse, for the sake of the friendship you have been pleased to show me, is not to come to any decision before we have met and talked over matters together. I shall return to see you in a few days—as soon as possible. Do not decide yet. You need rest; of that no one is more sensible than myself. Remain with your brother as long as may be necessary, but do not forget your poor parish at Ars. If some have been a source of trouble to you, reflect that it is only a very few, and that in general the parish is devoted to you. Think of all those good souls whom you are conducting in the way of salvation; of all those who had strayed far from it and you have brought back. Think of your *Providence* of which you are the soul and support, and which cannot exist without you. And think of the good of religion itself that God has called upon you to uphold and glorify

...
 "Whatever may be the will of God, do not, my dear Curé, forget me in your holy prayers. Nor my family: do not forget my little Joanny, to whom you have promised to give his First Communion, which would have been a great source of consolation and hope to Madame des Garets and myself, and a great blessing for the child. And do not forget your sorrowing flock, who, bereft of their pastor, are addressing the most fervent prayers to heaven that he may come back to them, and that God may lead him to our midst as soon as possible.

P. des Garets."

It is certain that this letter made a great impression on the Curé of Ars, for he read it several times. Besides, he had not left Dardilly as he was supposed to have done. He had hardly settled down at his brother's house than he resumed his penitential and mortified manner of life. After sundry little visits to old friends, which he felt bound to make, he never left the house except to go to the presbytery. The day M. des Garets came to look for him—he expected some such attempt and desired to avoid an interview at any cost, as he doubted his own heart and felt he would be unable to hold out against such entreaties as would surely be made—M. Vianney took the precaution of disappearing in the morning without saying where he was going. So that nobody might have to resort to falsehood, he told his nephew to reply to inquirers that he did not know where he was. As a matter of fact, he simply hid himself in the room above that in which M. des Garets was writing his letter.

Meanwhile the good folks at Ars, being persuaded that M. Vianney had left Dardilly, continued to search for him ; and there was much speculation as to where he might be.

“Pertinant has just left, resolved to tramp the country until he discovers M. le Curé. The young man is buoyed up by the hope that we shall not be separated from our pastor for long. This flight is the accomplishment of a long-cherished desire of the *Saint*, and one that has never left him—a desire which, till the other day, was not powerful enough to overcome his immense charity. When he got some distance from his church he entered into himself and saw all the work of God he was abandoning. He returned forthwith and went back to his confessional, where he remained some days, overwhelmed by a crowd whose attentions he would never allow anybody to restrain. Now he has fled, not from the work he was doing but from that which he was unable to do. The parish is in dismay. The little girls at the school are constantly in tears ; already at least half of them have gone away in despair. The multitude of pilgrims is passing away. The church is all but deserted. Occasionally a few poor girls come in and pray. I cannot describe the sadness that oppresses the heart at the sight of such a complete change ! It is a real passing from life to death . . . We had a chapter from the *Lives of the Saints* put into practice before our eyes day by day ; now the pages are turned, and we find in this latest outcome of events another chapter, and one in which the events are so exceptional that, although we may often be unable to understand, it is not permitted us to criticise them !”

The following was the answer to the above :—

“So it is decided, then ; the *Saint* has disappeared, and will probably not return to revivify the place which had no existence apart from him . . . We must not pass judgment on the saints ; their ways are just as incomprehensible as is the hand that guides

them. Were we so rash as to submit their proceedings to the feeble lights of our human wisdom, we might find ourselves at fault. In the present instance we might think it an error of judgment to abandon the great work that God accomplished by the hands of your *Saint* in favour of an ideal personal perfection. Can a few years of pious solitude be compared to the innumerable conversions, to this return to the primitive faith, to a spectacle so admirable that it might well rejoice the heavens and excite the acclamations of the angels? There might be much to be said on that point; but it were much better to be silent, to bow our heads and adore; for the divine wisdom has said: 'Your ways are not my ways, nor are your thoughts mine . . . and what you regard as folly is in my eyes true wisdom.'

"Let us restrain ourselves then, and not allow ourselves to judge here below him who, perhaps before very long, seated at the side of the supreme Judge, will judge the judges themselves . . . But though reverence may forbid blame, it does not forbid dismay and regret—so it seems to me, for I draw a distinct line between them. Nevertheless, I am not hopeless; and I shall be more pleased than surprised to hear that the good *Saint*, moved by the arguments and kindly feeling shown towards him, has surrendered at discretion. Already the wise and Christian remarks set forth by Prosper have had sufficient influence to delay the execution of his plans; we may hope that it is for him the glory is reserved of bringing back to us this Elias who has not found the chariot of fire in which to escape. This life has been hard for him: like our Lord he has fallen beneath the Cross he took up of his own accord; his steps faltered; he had need of a breathing-space. Once he casts his eyes over his Jerusalem, the tears of his children will move him; he will come back. Perhaps he will see that it is among them that he may find the Calvary near which he ought to live, on which he may have to die. His divine Master hid Himself, fled to the desert when a too indiscreet multitude published His praises and would have proclaimed Him a king; but He re-appeared almost immediately to fulfil His mission of mercy and pity."

On 18th September the issue of the matter was still uncertain.

"Thank you for your sympathy in our anxiety, to which sadness and discouragement seem likely to succeed, for we have very little hope indeed. The holy Curé hides from those who would seek him. We have sent again to-day to try to find him, but without any great prospect of success. In this world we have to resign ourselves to everything—even to the loss of heaven's favours. Still, happy should we be could we but say that we had profited by them. The entire parish is striking its breast with vehement cries of *mea culpa*."

In proof of the general feeling, we may quote the few lines

written by the landlord of the village inn, which reached the holy man in his retirement. The man was evidently afraid that something in his business had displeased his pastor :—

“ Monsieur, I hasten to implore you not to abandon us. You know what I have always said ; and I repeat it from the bottom of my heart : if there be anything about my house of which you disapprove I submit myself entirely to your pleasure.”

M. Vianney also received a letter from Catherine. The worthy woman had been his only confidante ; he had concealed nothing from her, as he could rely upon her perfect and willing obedience. No one had suffered from the separation more than she ; nevertheless she asked nothing from the Lord but that the most holy will might be accomplished. Such is the school in which saints are formed. She gave the Curé to understand that they had still fifteen little ones with them ; she conjured him in the name of God to have some care for his health ; and she informed him of all that the Abbé Raymond was doing with Mgr. Devie to put the situation on some regular basis. Not having found his Bishop at Bourg, the Curé of Savigneux had journeyed to Belley, returning with two letters, one being addressed to M. des Garets, in which Mgr. Devie wrote :—

“ I have this moment received a letter from your holy Curé ; I have also received the one you did me the honour of addressing to me. I am sending my two replies to M. Raymond. I am telling the good Curé that my wish is that he remain at Ars, notwithstanding the motives which he believes draw him elsewhere ; and I hope he will yield to my arguments. Nevertheless, in order not to be too exacting, I have mentioned two other positions in which I could place him. It was by showing myself thus disposed towards him that I turned him from his project of leaving Ars some years since ; I count on the same result now. Your own entreaties and those of his parishioners and the Curés of the neighbourhood will, I hope, help to establish him permanently among you ; but, in any event, I would never be a party to his leaving the diocese of Belley. I should fear to lose such a treasure . . . ”

On 19th September it was not known in the village what precisely had become of the holy fugitive. They imagined he had left his family.

“ M. le Curé is in a parish not far from Dardilly, which he has quitted in order to be a little quiet ; for there are nearly as many strangers in Dardilly as at Ars. He is quite resolved to remain in the diocese of Belley, but it is supposed he will not come back to Ars. The place of his retirement is concealed as much as possible, so that he may not be followed and importuned. We are hovering between hope and fear. The faithful Pertinant has just left, bearing a letter for our *Saint* full of entreaty : we ask him not to abandon us for good. The parish is in consternation.

On Sunday Canon des Garets officiated ; he made a charming discourse on the virtues of M. le Curé. Everyone present was in tears. You have no idea of the desolate spectacle that our poor little church presents : day and night it used to be filled with pilgrims, now it is deserted. I went there yesterday ; besides Mademoiselle Pignaut and one old woman there was nobody. The village is silent and lifeless, as the departure of the holy Curé has caused the pilgrims to depart also. Verily, if the *Angelus* were not heard, we might be taken for a parish of heathen."

Ars in fact was at Ars no longer. Ars, or at least its pilgrim-age, had migrated to Dardilly. M. des Garets went there on 14th September, and as, from the 15th, M. Vianney took no further precautions to hide his whereabouts, the pilgrims who had followed his footsteps and haunted his vicinity flocked thither ; his most distant relatives betook themselves there as well. The humble home of the Vianneys was never empty. The good Curé was obliged to ask faculties from the Archbishop* at least to complete the confessions begun at Ars. We have seen the little upper-room in which he lived for eight days, and where he gave his audiences. The family were all at work in the fields. A young girl, his niece, was the only one left ; and she did the duty of doorkeeper. Her uncle enjoined her to receive all the pilgrims kindly, and let no one depart without being offered some refreshment.

On Sunday, as the report of M. Vianney's presence had spread abroad in Lyons, numerous parties came from that city, in which the enthusiasm for M. Vianney had always been very marked. An omnibus also brought a contingent from Ars. In short, as his niece told us, the influx was so great that they could not discharge the duties of hospitality as they would have wished, and did not dine themselves until after Vespers. The holy Curé sat down to dinner with his family, but would only consent to eat a stewed pear, in spite of all entreaties. On the other hand, he talked a great deal, told some edifying anecdotes very well, and, addressing himself to Madame Fayolle of Écully, said, among other things : " Be sure, my cousin, whenever you assist the dying in order to dispose them to appear before God, that you never cease to talk to them until you are absolutely certain they have breathed their last ; for this is what happened to myself lately—all had given me up, and let me lie without saying a word to me, so well were they persuaded that I was even then at my last breath. I was then awaiting the judgment of God, when the doctor felt my pulse and said : ' He has only a few minutes to live.' Hearing this, I thought to myself : ' In a few minutes thou wilt be before God ; thou wilt appear there empty-handed.' Then, at the remembrance of so many people at my door who had come so far to make their confession, I commended myself with all my

* Dardilly was in the archdiocese of Lyons.

heart to the Blessed Virgin and St. Philomena. 'Lord,' said I, 'if I can be of any more use, do not withdraw me from this world !' At the same moment I felt all my energy revive within me and all my strength return."

Meanwhile strangers continued to arrive—much to the embarrassment of his family. This made M. Vianney reflect and influenced his determination. Besides which the Abbé Raymond had been in Dardilly since Saturday 16th, resolved to carry his mission to a successful conclusion by restoring to the diocese of Belley the treasure it had so nearly lost. But he understood that his victory would be fiercely disputed. For no sooner had his intentions got wind than he found everybody looking askance at him. The people of Dardilly had conspired to keep the Saint among them, and later on to ask for him as their curé. From the first M. Raymond found himself hampered by this ingenuous little plot: suspicion greeted him at every turn, nothing but hesitating answers were forthcoming; and a good deal of diplomacy and perseverance was required even to get into the presence of the Curé of Ars; but he managed to do so on the second day.

The result of the interview was a rendezvous for the following day at the presbytery of a neighbouring priest. Thenceforward the affair progressed satisfactorily; the Abbé Raymond took leave of the Curé of Dardilly with whom he had stayed; and the latter accompanied him beyond the confines of his parish, to be quite sure that the departure was genuine and that there was no fear of the return of the reverend diplomatist.

Very early on Monday morning the Abbé Vianney called his brother and, telling him what he was about to do, asked him to accompany him. They started as soon as possible, so as not to excite attention, for everybody was on the look-out. The Curé of Ars was so much exhausted by his previous journey to Dardilly that it was impossible for him to make the present one on foot. So his brother saddled a horse and led it himself as far as the entrance to the village of Albigny, where they parted. There M. Vianney met the Abbé Raymond, who awaited him; and having said Mass they left to visit the chapel at Beaumont, where Mgr. Devie had proposed that the holy priest should reside henceforth. The walk tried the poor fugitive sorely, and the jolting of a rickety vehicle they managed to procure hardly less so. As they passed a church the Curé of Ars said: "Let us go in." The two travellers entered, and knelt down to recite part of their Office. When they rose to leave they were astonished to find that the church was as full of people as though they had been summoned by sound of bell. Thereupon M. Raymond remarked to his companion that he could hardly do less than say a few words to these good folks.

M. Vianney began to speak; when behold another wonder! He who before his illness had such a feeble voice that it was difficult to follow him in ordinary conversation, was now perfectly

heard by all present ; and he spoke, as M. Raymond remarked, with a force that was perfectly marvellous.

A little further on they stopped for the night at the presbytery of Beaumont ; and at daybreak they said Mass in this ancient and rustic sanctuary of the Mother of God. As they were devoutly making their thanksgiving, M. Vianney leaned over to M. Raymond, and said in a most resolute tone : " Let us go back to Ars." There is no doubt that this was an inspiration, and one for which Ars is indebted to our Lady of Beaumont. The remembrance of it has never been forgotten by the inhabitants of Ars ; and they paid their debt by frequent visits to this shrine of her whose goodness to them had laid them under such great obligations.

A carriage was soon ready. They drove as far as Ambérieux, which is nearly two miles from Savigneux. At the latter place they halted for M. Vianney to rest a little ; while the Abbé Raymond hastily despatched his servant to Ars to announce to the inhabitants that their beloved pastor was returning to them.

Instantly the population was at the doors on tiptoe of expectation : " What's the matter ? " asked some. " M. le Curé," replied others. The news spread through the village like a light applied to a train of powder. The square filled with people ; workmen left their work, threshers threw down their flails, the women left their household affairs to manage themselves. Scouts were sent along the road to signal the coming of the holy man ; everyone tried to gain a position whence he or she might be the first to see him. Then a great shout arose : " Here is the *Saint* ! " they rushed to meet him, scrambling to be the first to do so, and a scene of indescribable confusion ensued. Some could only weep for joy, others threw themselves on their knees to ask his blessing. The more he humbled himself before them the more the signs of respect increased ; some kissed his feet, others tried to touch his soutane, the greater number dissolved in tears and commended themselves to his prayers. He made the round of the square on the arm of M. Raymond, bestowing his benedictions. When it became possible to extricate himself from the crowd he went to the church and said night prayers, the entire parish being present, only too happy to be once more united to their pastor in the most profound dispositions of gratitude, praise and adoration.

We may recur again to the correspondent who has already given us so much interesting information :—

" Let us bless and praise the Lord ! Yesterday evening at five the parish was still sorrowing and searching for the *Saint* whom all thought was lost to us. A quarter-of-an-hour later the bells rang out a joyful peel and all the inhabitants of Ars gathered in the square, and presently saw the good Curé arrive, dragging himself along with difficulty by the aid of his pilgrim's staff. He was accompanied by a priest. They wept, laughed,

pressed round him, beside themselves with joy at their good fortune. Then he stopped, and smiling on the surging crowd, said 'All was lost, was it? Very well then, now it is all found again.' Prosper ran up, and the *Saint* took him in his arms with the delight of a father who recovers his son. Nor does he conceal his satisfaction. He is pleased with the Blessed Virgin who gave him the inspiration to return to his own. He is pleased with his Bishop, who has shown most wonderful consideration towards him and his bereaved flock. And he is pleased with his poor flock themselves, who have opened their hearts so wide to receive him.

"The good women will have it that the bells rang of themselves, and that nobody ascended to the belfry. It is quite impossible to give any coherent account of the scene, so simple, so moving, and so religious. I could write a volume about it, but I have hardly time enough to write this. I saw our recovered *Saint* for a moment; there was real tenderness in his look and voice. 'There is,' said he, 'a great consolation within me.' He is much occupied with an idea of the Bishop's—to build a chapel at the *Providence*, to which he may be able to retire by and by . . .

"To the mourning of our church has succeeded an intense gladness. It is about to resume its astonishing celebrity. And to what is that celebrity due? It is due neither to talents, learning, eloquence, nor any external charm: it is due to the surpassing sanctity of one poor priest, meek and humble of heart."

CHAPTER XXV

THE SUPPRESSION OF THE PROVIDENCE

I have the mark of true charity if, when I ask something of God and He deigns not to grant it, I love Him the more ; and if He bring the contrary to pass I love Him doubly on account of it. (B. Jacopone da Todi.)

. . . Nothing remains but suffering, loss, to keep nothing and never to repulse the hand that afflicts. . . This non-resistance is terrible to nature, but God enables us to encompass it and our Lord sweetens it. (Fénelon, *Let. spir.*)

TRIALS are the crucible into which our Lord casts a great soul which He would prepare for heaven ; and those to which the eternal wisdom had determined to subject His servant would not have been complete if they had only included the sacrifice of pleasure in his apostolic labours, his reputation, his health and rest—he had long been dead to all these. But when the question arises of the glory of the holy name of God, of the establishment of the kingdom of Jesus Christ upon earth, of what one believes to make for good ; then it is that the will would reassert itself. And yet, on this point, as on the others, the will must submit and pronounce the divine *fiat* of resignation ; and the saint, instead of having a will of his own, must permit God to will in his place all that is according to His Spirit.

We often spend ourselves in giving our Lord something He has not asked of us, all the while withholding from Him the principal—it may be the only—thing He would have. The supreme point of perfection is to be without being, i.e., entirely absorbed in the divine will : it is thus that one becomes everything without adverting to the fact. But this state is only attained by tranquilly allowing oneself to be consumed in the crucible of divine love—even to the very last traces of our own will—and not repulsing the invisible hand that strikes and destroys.

If our holy Curé ever had any temptation to repulse this adorable hand, it must have been when an attack threatened his orphanage. Few are found—even among the best of the great servants of God, whom no affliction could embitter, no disappointment disgust—who, without yielding to enthusiasm or egoistical discouragement, lead the generous life that seeks guidance, assistance and approval from the heavenly Master alone.

We have seen all that God had done to sustain this excellent work ; how it lived on the secret resources of divine Providence ; how it became firmly established and what good it had effected. Within its precincts sixty orphans found shelter, employment, sympathetic counsel and angelic example. If the inspiration of the God of charity had ever been apparent in any human idea, assuredly it was in this one. Those who saw the work of the directresses of the house, though they may not have had suffi-

cient illumination to understand that heaven would one day own them for saints, might at least have admitted that earth ought to own them as good faithful women who were rendering conspicuous service to society by preparing excellent mothers of families out of the castaways of human corruption. Nevertheless the institution founded by M. Vianney received from these people nothing but criticism and disapproval. They had very much to say and much fault to find; the undertaking itself was so novel, the house was so poor, its very appearance was singular, and as for its interior economy, it was abnormal! human prudence and universally accepted methods being disregarded in a perfectly scandalous fashion! Good—like the kingdom of heaven, for which it is a preparation—always suffers violence in this world. That had always been a hopeful sign in the eyes of the founder himself, who saw in it the ordinary seal of the works of God. "The one essential," he used to say, "is to know that one is doing good. After that one can let people talk, going forward the while with such prudence as may be required."

But now the time was to arrive when the objections that had gradually gathered round this humble asylum were to lead to a transformation. Perhaps this was the hardest trial in the whole life of the Curé of Ars. God could not have touched him more deeply nor in a more sensitive spot than by the ruin of a work whence his zeal drew fresh encouragement daily, in which his spirit found an agreeable relaxation from more painful toils and his soul consolation and repose. In every difficult or important circumstance he had set his dear children to pray, and as often—as he has since avowed—had those prayers been heard, so powerful is the cry of feebleness and innocence before God. The directresses told us that M. le Curé often asked for novenas at the *Providence* for the conversion of sinners. Immediately avalanches of strangers descended upon Ars. It was in this manner that the pilgrimage began during the years 1825-6-7.

We may assume therefore, that this painful trial must be ascribed to that adorable will which, in order to enhance the merits of a saintly soul still further, asks of it sacrifices most heart-rending and incomprehensible to the human mind. Desirous of exterminating the last vestige of self-love in this predestined soul, Almighty God permitted that the prejudices against the poverty of the house should be diffused far and wide. They did not call it "poverty." To the worldly eye, and in the official phraseology, it was "disorder," "defective installation," "unsatisfactory hygienic conditions"—an illegal state of things altogether. How many such illegalities do we not find in the Gospel! So many in fact, that it were hardly within the compass of human authority to correct them!

These objections were put into circulation by the Inspectors of the University under the civil administration, and dutifully

echoed by the public. Sundry of the inhabitants of Ars, impelled by feelings of vanity and an arrogance very much out of place, contributed their share in discrediting the work of the holy Curé—how repugnant it was to their feelings to send their children to the same school as paupers! All these causes combined to make some change imperative. Let us hear Catherine on the subject: never have the words of this excellent woman had a more touching ring of sincerity in them; and they have an especial interest when it is remembered that no inconsiderable share in the sacrifice fell upon her:—

“The devil, always jealous of the good that was being effected at the *Providence*, began to do his best to counteract the efforts of the holy man. He began by endless calumnies out of doors. It seemed that the institution was unable to support the little ones—they were nothing but a public burden. Then the older ones attracted the ill-will and evil-tongued gossip of the critics: ‘What a shame,’ said they, ‘to see great girls who are perfectly well able to earn their own living, doing nothing else from morn till night but mumble prayers!’ This was untrue—prayer was only their relaxation. Would idleness, vagabondage, and the vice from which they had been rescued have been better for them? Masters and mistresses came by the score to hire them. Those who had passed a sufficient period with us were placed out willingly enough, but not others; and this caused murmuring and raillery among the detractors. True it is that some, whose conversion was not sincere, have been found wanting and have not given good example; but the number of such is very small.

“But this is not all. Several influential personages—among whom even priests—were of opinion that the inmates were becoming too numerous: that it was not becoming that merely secular persons, whose work would die with them, should continue to conduct a work that obviously pertained to a religious congregation which, never becoming extinct, could perpetuate its beneficent operations.

“Yet again it was alleged that the young women in charge of the classes were insufficiently instructed themselves. There was a certain amount of truth in this; but, after all, is great learning required in those who have to instruct cooks, servant-maids and working girls? Will it not suffice to be able to teach them to read, write and work?”

These criticisms and the complaints that reached him from every quarter disquieted the servant of God. He set great store by his *Providence*, but he understood that the adverse opinion which was shaping itself was a serious obstacle to its prosperity; that in his desire to retain its primitive form he might not be taking the designs of God into account; and that in case of his death it might not survive him. Yet to surrender it was an immense sacrifice: it was to surrender the work of his heart. Nevertheless,

after due consideration, he decided with his accustomed humility and with the consent of the diocesan authorities to transfer the direction of his *Providence* to the Sisters of St. Joseph. In November, 1847, after some preliminaries the Vicar-General of the diocese and the Superior General of the Sisters of St. Joseph, who had been sent to Ars, came to an agreement, and prepared a formal document by which M. Vianney transferred the house and chapel to the Sisters of St. Joseph.

The soul that has dispelled the mists of pride understands that God wishes nothing but its own good ; and thus forms the conclusion that everything God gives or permits in this life is sent by His love for our sanctification, to aid our salvation and the growth of our perfection. Consequently, when a Christian thoroughly appreciates this he reverently accepts disappointments, misfortune and loss, seeking only the honour and glory of the Holy Name in the salvation of souls. Such are the saints : bowing to the divine will, detached from self, resigned to everything, never surprised, disconcerted or cast down. To them everything that happens is a message from God, to be received with equal reverence, a command to be carried out with equal promptitude, or a grace from God for which they bless Him with equal love. " The just shall be in everlasting remembrance : he shall not fear the evil hearing." (Ps. cxi, 17). The Holy Ghost has taught them the august power of the words FIAT VOLUNTAS TUA ! They understand when we do but murmur ; they practise while we fail to appreciate. Thy will be done ! that is to say : Grant, O my God, that we may see Thy will in everything ; that we may find everything holy and desirable ; that we may ever wish nothing but its entire and complete accomplishment. Teach us not only to submit to it when it is most contrary to our own, but to love it and take it as the sole rule of our thoughts and actions ! May our designs miscarry, our plans fail, our joys perish, if such be Thy will, O Lord ! It is right, it is good for us : be Thou obeyed, glorified and blessed !

" When this happened " (adds Catherine) " the chapel at the *Providence* was not yet finished. M. le Curé was building it, so as to be able to say Mass there—intending to retire to the rooms which were being built close to. May God be blessed for everything ! Without doubt it was His will to detach His servant even more from any satisfaction he might have felt even in doing good.

" For some time he had been arranging to secure the perpetuity of his work. As the original directresses were advancing in years, three others had been selected—to help them at first, to succeed them eventually. They resided in the house : two of them were about to be sent to receive more advanced instruction, so as to be capable of carrying on the work more efficiently ; the third—a dressmaker by profession—would take charge of the household work. M. Vianney, who had at first regarded the scheme as

excellent, began to doubt its opportuneness when he perceived the scant favour with which it was received."

The Curé seems to have had a presentiment of the destiny of his *Providence*, and of its final transformation. Once he said to Catherine: "St. Joseph has asked something from me; but I am thinking that someone else will carry it through later." To which the good woman replied: "What St. Joseph wants ought to be done." "David," replied he, "wanted to build a temple to the Lord; he didn't do it: it was Solomon who built it." This conversation may have been a sort of prophetic intuition, and when M. Vianney referred to St. Joseph he may have alluded to the Bourg Congregation; and may also have already conceived the idea of ceding the house to them. In any case, it is quite certain that the holy Curé did not do so until the last extremity; when his own reflections and the advice he was bound to respect had gained such influence with him that he ended by taking the measures that were assumed to be necessary.

True and perfect charity seeks not to serve its neighbour for the neighbour's sake, but for the sake of God; and desires to do for the neighbour what it cannot do for God: for it well understands that He who is perfectly sufficient for Himself has no need of us. That is why the apostle who zealously seeks the salvation of his neighbour, having in sincere humility done all that depends on himself and all that the present state of things permits, pauses, insists no more, possesses himself in peace; he bides his time till circumstances shall allow him to effect greater good, and does not pretend to render more glory than God has asked for.

Such were the reasons that led the Curé of Ars to convert his *Providence* into a house for gratuitous education—a very useful and important work, but little in accordance with his original idea; besides which, its benefits were thenceforth to be confined to the parish, whereas he had wished at first to extend them further afield. Great was his sorrow, but God wishes that our sacrifices should cost us something. But this sorrow always remained holy, for M. Vianney had no tinge of bitterness in his sanctity and, like St. Paul, he rejoiced in the midst of his sufferings. His one wish was the triumph of God in this transformation of the work on which he had set his heart and which he never ceased to regret. Years afterwards, in a confidential conversation concerning a matter on which his advice had been asked, and which had some bearing on the suppressed orphanage, he said, with a smiling face:—"I had sixty or seventy children there—picked up on the highways and by-ways of the Dombes. The poor things were ignorant of the very first truths of religion; there were some who hadn't made their First Communion and knew neither *Pater*, *Ave*, nor *Credo*. They left us, a considerable number as religious, plenty as excellent servants, and many to be good mothers of families. There was much outcry about the elder ones; but it was just those who gave the most consolation.

I had nobody to keep things together for me but divine Providence, and divine Providence never failed me." And he went on to talk of this precious self-abandonment to Providence that is never misplaced, and concluded: "May our Lord give us the joy of sacrifice! He never proved His love otherwise than by suffering. It seems that He knew no other way of attaining His end; it is the only way that leads to heaven. All goes well if we bear our cross as we ought to bear it."

The Superior of the Missionaries and the Abbé Toccanier have often heard him say: "In the days of my *Providence* I had sixty mouths to feed: matters were a trifle unbusiness-like, but money came in from everywhere—I had more than I needed. Since more business-like methods have been put in force, resources have greatly diminished."

Almighty God sends no trial without consolation. The venerable Curé of Ars did not see the good accomplished in the form in which he had originally conceived it, but he saw it perpetuated under another. His *Providence*, turned into a school for gratuitous instruction and a boarding-school under the direction of the Sisters of St. Joseph—whose devotion is the admiration of all France—produced most excellent results among the young girls of Ars; and this went far to assuage his regret. His plans had been restricted, but they were realised in one essential particular. God gave him the increase promised to those who only seek His justice, by inspiring him to found missions. He had seemed to take from M. Vianney the means of saving souls; but He had only prepared him to accomplish the salvation of a greater number. There are always great blessings in the trail of great sacrifices.

If the grain of corn falls on the earth and there dies not, it remains alone: but if it die it brings forth much fruit. This fruitful death of the grain of corn represents the transformation of souls dead to themselves, whose life is hidden with Christ in God. This living death comprises everything that humiliates, everything that hurts, all that restrains zeal, hinders effort, stifles generous impulse, all that leads to a nothingness, negligible and useless in this world: it is found in the unintelligent malignity of men who know nothing of our best projects, who associate themselves with our noblest enterprises only to wreck them; it is seen in the senseless jealousy and calculated ill-will which throw cold water upon our enthusiasm and generous ideals—in short, it is the agglomeration of weaknesses, misunderstandings, susceptibilities, suspicions and ignoble passions in which our life is wrapped up as with a winding-sheet. This is the sepulchre wherein we must be laid beside Jesus Christ, to die like the grain of corn cast into the earth, in the spirit of faith, submission and, above all, of never-failing hope: and from it we shall emerge like our Lord from His tomb and the grain of corn from the soil, more living and more fruitful than ever. The pilgrimage of Ars is the proof of this.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE ORIGIN OF THE PILGRIMAGE. THE REPUTATION OF M. VIANNEY COMMENCES TO EXTEND. MULTITUDES OF PEOPLE COME TO ARS

The land that was desolate and impassable shall be glad, and the wilderness shall rejoice, and shall flourish like the lily . . . the glory of Libanus is given to it : the beauty of Carmel and Saron . . . for the waters are broken out in the desert, and streams in the wilderness. And that which was dry land shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water . . . And a path and a way shall be there, and it shall be called the holy way . . . and this shall be unto you a straight way, so that fools shall not err therein . . . but they shall walk there that shall be delivered. And the redeemed of the Lord shall return . . . with praise (Is. xxxv., 1-10).

It is not uncommon to meet with men who, while maintaining an inward love and respect for the truths of religion, permit themselves to say that the paramount influence and triumphant manifestations of them that Almighty God has given in times past have altogether ceased ; that the faith and virtues of the early Christians are impossible in our own times, and that we must be content to admire them as matters of history which—so these people seem to think—has perhaps been a trifle overlaid by the efforts of imagination and the embellishments of legend.

To such timid and half-hearted Christians we have nothing to say, except to point to those striking evidences which clearly show our own century as one in which God has most abundantly manifested His power and proved that He is faithful to His promises. In the first rank of such evidences we think it permissible to place the Pilgrimage to Ars.

This Pilgrimage, which lasted over thirty years, with a singular volume and pertinacity, will occupy a large place in the annals of Christianity in the nineteenth century. It gives our monograph so entirely distinctive a feature that the work might well be taken for poetry rather than history. For we shall find all the wonders with which ancient hagiographers were wont to illustrate their narratives presented to our view in a supereminent degree. But we are not yet in a mythical age ; and it can hardly be alleged that legendary elaboration has already been busy with the life of this man, which was contemporaneous with our own. It is a history that counts its witnesses by the thousand and hundred-thousand : in which is seen everything we so admire in the stories of the past, all that we regard as a heroism perfectly impossible in the present, namely : perfect abnegation, terrible austerity, humility unparalleled, a love of God without limit. In reward of this complete self-abandonment of a creature to his Creator we

shall find the gift of influence with souls, the power of attracting them from afar, of touching the heart, of conversion, and of saving. Again we shall find, as a mark of this empire in the spiritual order, an extraordinary power over nature, ability to change the ordinary conditions of things, the gift of curing bodily infirmity, of reading the secrets of hearts, of predicting the future—in short, the gifts of miracles and prophecy. If these things are not what was greatest in the lives of the saints, they are at least that which most held the imagination of the multitudes of their time.

In the Curé of Ars we behold a reproduction of much that seems extraordinary in the legends of former ages. We see repeated what is most sublime in the lives of the Fathers of the desert, and most marvellous in those of the wonder-workers whom mediæval history represents as ever attended by a fascinated crowd. In him we see manifested the most heroic and at the same time most modest virtue, a most austere habit of life, which was at the same time most gentle, the widest and most tender charity ; a speech that was most powerful, albeit most kind. Such a spectacle has long since faded from the imagination of a generation entranced by visions of another order, distraught by alien thoughts, beset, by different attractions, occupied with other cares. The renown of M. Vianney continued ever to extend, even to the point of drawing crowds of people from most distant regions and arresting the attention of the Catholic world—the more so as for many years it had almost been forgotten what it is to have a Saint in our midst.

The miraculous life of M. Vianney presents a vista of extraordinary works of sanctity, such as had not been publicly seen since the days of St. Vincent de Paul and the Blessed Pierre Fourier. And the result is a living demonstration in our own time of all the truths practised by those great Saints, which shows that even our neglect of them is powerless to effect their destruction, and that they still survive in all their original force and fruitfulness. “ Before I had been to Ars,” said a man to us, “ and seen the *good Father* (this was the title with which the pilgrims had invested the servant of God from the beginning), I could hardly believe what is related in the Lives of the Saints : many things appeared to me to be so impossible. Now I believe them all, because I have seen them all with my own eyes, and much more besides.”

Thanks to the sanctity of M. Vianney within our own times, we can—if we yield to the evidence of our eyes and ears—not only convince ourselves, but also prove to others, that the vitality of the Faith is in no way diminished ; that Holy Church has in nowise lost her primitive fecundity, being capable of bringing forth in this nineteenth century men who, in forming themselves as disciples and imitators of the divine Master, not only become the most amiable, the wisest and most beneficent of their race ;

but also draw their fellow-creatures to adopt the same course as they themselves pursue—the course of truth, goodness and virtue.

Doubtless the present is not the first instance in the history of mankind of this grand phenomenon—an influence that arouses the masses and, drawing them out of the slough of indifference, sets them on the firm path of sanctity. The first disciples of our divine Lord experienced the effect of the promise: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself.” (John xii., 32). Hamlets, cities, provinces and entire countries have been seen to yield to the preaching of their successors. Later the deserts of Syria and Upper Egypt became populated at the voice of Paul, Anthony, their contemporaries and those who followed them. St. Simeon Stylites beheld, not only the Syrians—his compatriots—but Persians, Arabs, Armenians, and even citizens of Spain, Britain and Gaul at his feet.

These popular movements were constant during the Middle Ages. Directly a man appeared with the halo of sanctity, a reputation for knowledge, the gift of eloquence, or charged with some fresh aspect of truth newly brought to light and with power to move the multitudes, the renown attaching to his name set a current in motion towards his person, which continued even over his tomb. Such were Peter the Hermit, St. Bernard, St. Dominic, St. Francis of Assisi, and, coming to an age nearer our own, St. Francis of Paula, St. Philip Neri, St. Vincent Ferrer, St. John Francis Regis. But, it may be contended, these times are gone never to return; that the enfeeblement of the spiritual sense has long since protested against any sort of manifestation of faith and enthusiasm; that in a generation of enlightenment, free to examine and pitiless in criticism, people are no longer susceptible of that degree of exaltation which would permit them to be dominated and guided by these movements.

To this false and depressing opinion the Pilgrimage of Ars gave a solemn contradiction. If St. Jerome, speaking of one of the phases of the fourth century, could say that one day the world was astounded to find itself Arian, we ourselves, in reflecting on what happened under our own eyes for thirty years, can bear better and happier testimony to the fact that France, finding within herself a lively Catholic spirit, abundant religious vitality, and an unexpected desire to believe and to venerate, was astounded to find herself so deeply and confessedly Christian. Ars would appear to be the protest of the nineteenth century against the incredulity of its predecessor. In an epoch in which independence of thought had been carried to its utmost limit, is it not marvellous to see the proud intellects of the most intelligent and enlightened country in Europe bow themselves before a poor rustic Curé as before a Father of the Church? We doubt if there has been an instance of such a power since the days of St. Bernard.

The first to come to Ars were chosen souls in need of higher and

firmer direction ; anxious souls in search of peace of mind ; but more than all, poor people who hoped for a share of the alms of the holy Curé, and sick who implored the aid of his prayers. Thus commenced the apostolate of M. Vianney—in the same manner as did that of our Lord—among the poor, the afflicted and the feeble. St. Francis of Sales remarks that kindness is one of the foundations of fame. It began to be whispered in the neighbourhood how gentle was the Curé of Ars towards the guilty, how patient with the scrupulous, how sympathetic to the unhappy, how willing to help all. Sinners came to seek this good priest, who received them with tears ; the poor hastened to those beneficent hands which had nothing to give and yet always gave something ; those in trouble knew that from his lips would issue abundant life and consolation ; while those torn with doubt sought the word that should bring conviction. The just came too, for his heart was a perpetual fire of love, at which all other hearts could renew their warmth.

Known only to a very few at first, the virtue of the servant of God became gradually more widely appreciated, and every day brought him fresh admirers. The example of austerity, of which we have spoken in a former chapter, the marvellous events connected with the foundation of the *Providence*, and others with which we are unacquainted, speedily penetrated La Bresse, Beaujolais, Lyons, Forez, Dauphiné and Burgundy. There was a sort of record of the happenings at Ars which passed from cottage to cottage, from town to town, laying in the memory of the inhabitants an immortal foundation for the reputation of M. Vianney. As for M. Vianney himself, the only feeling that possessed him in the midst of all this respect and reverence was one of supreme distrust in himself. How much good there was to do ! Oh ! if he could but escape and make room for someone more worthy ! This was the burden of the temptation that never ceased to haunt his whole life ; but, as we have seen, it had its roots in humility.

But the more pains the Curé of Ars took to hide and annihilate himself, the more the popular favour persisted in its efforts to drag him into the light of day. It was the promise of the Gospel over again : “ He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” (Luke xiv., 11). God only gives glory to Man on condition that Man shall not be carried away by it, and thus shows himself beyond the reach of the appreciation of his fellow-men.

In this manner the multitude increased at Ars between 1825 and 1830. Later on a notable cure, greeted in the first instance with enthusiasm and reputed a miracle, came to give a fresh impetus to the Pilgrimage. Soon, however, as was to be expected—for it is the usual trend of the human mind in regard to the gifts of Almighty God—a reaction set in concerning it, due to weakness and fear. Many of those who had been the first and loudest to acclaim the miracle now denied it point-blank, as if to excuse themselves for having believed it. But its effects continued

to influence the masses generally, and public good feeling still saw in it the manifestation of a Power which cannot be entirely ignored, and which avenges our ingratitude by bestowing benefits upon us.

The numerous cures worked one after another before the relics of St. Philomena in the next few years drew many people to Ars. "But what most augmented this influx," says Catherine, "was the prayers of M. le Curé for the conversion of sinners. The grace that he drew down was so powerful that it went in search of sinners and left them not an instant's respite." We think that what public opinion first revered in M. Vianney was this immense power of intercession; those hands ever raised between heaven and earth to gain the benedictions of one and the confidence of the other; those never-ceasing fervent supplications, those torrents of prayer and floods of tears poured out at the feet of Him who wishes to be entreated and moved in this manner.

Grace was so powerful that it went in search of sinners. It is impossible to express it better, and this explains the Pilgrimage to Ars in a few words. Divine Providence willed that for thirty years the people of the nineteenth century, so enamoured of all vain things, should come in crowds to do homage to humility and simplicity. While our men of talent were inveighing against confession and its influence, their hearers replied by going to confession at Ars. It was towards the CONFESSOR that the movement first began.

"M. Vianney was in his room at nine o'clock one night" (says a letter, the date of which takes us back to the early days of the Pilgrimage), "when he suddenly heard a vigorous knock at the door, and a voice that called: 'Come down at once; I want to speak to you.' The holy man allowed the summons to be repeated twice or thrice; then he opened the door and found a great tall fellow with a very determined air who said: 'Come to the church; I am resolved to make my confession, and that at once.' The poor Curé, who to the holy fear of God added a very natural fear of robbers, hesitated a moment; then his zeal urged him on. The robust stranger turned out to be a waggoner who had left his cart and horses at the church-door. He made his confession, and then M. Vianney said: 'Stop a moment; you have a bad cold; here is a pair of woollen stockings; put them on at once.' He did not have to speak twice; and the waggoner, quite satisfied with men and things, went off to rejoin his team."

There was no day on which the holy priest did not have some such consolation. The strangers who began to lay siege to him at his post of honour and suffering thought themselves well repaid for the fatigues of a long journey and its attendant discomforts by the happiness of having seen him, of having laid at his feet the secrets of their heart, and by the peace of mind which they recovered along with the return of the grace of God. They never

forgot the kindness with which the Curé received them, the patience with which he heard them, and the sweetness with which he consoled them.

Curiosity had also a certain share in the movement. Many came to Ars to see the ascetic features of the Curé, who was held up as a model of what a true penitent should be. Thus, we read in a letter written during the octave of Corpus Christi :

“ At eight o'clock we went to Benediction. A church filled with the faithful, among whom a great number of strangers ; walls hung with banners, tabernacle resplendent with gilding, the monstrance glistening with precious stones, a multitude of candles that played and flashed on the gold and diamonds ; a priest worn out by fasts and vigils, pronouncing in a scarcely audible voice the words of a prayer in which he breathes forth the intensity of his love ; such is the moving spectacle presented to us every evening.”

The limited accommodation available at Ars as well as its poor quality might well have arrested the progress of the Pilgrimage, had it been a matter of pure curiosity or caprice ; since it was God's affair, not only was it sustained, but even seemed miraculously to increase. Persons of the highest rank, accustomed to the luxury and refinement of their own splendid mansions, were seen to be perfectly happy and contented with the meagre hospitality afforded by the village.

“ In the person of the Curé of Ars ” (wrote a pilgrim) “ there was something that captivated and absorbed one to such an extent that, in his vicinity, we forgot all about even the necessities of life. Poorly lodged, badly fed, rising before daylight, crowded, elbowed, pushed about, people braved cold, hunger and thirst, fatigue, want of sleep—all just to hear a few words from the good Saint. They wouldn't have done as much for a king.”

The pilgrims were often huddled together. The houses in Ars were small, inconvenient, and not in the least suitable for the reception of so many strangers. In one room, and that only measuring a few feet either way, eight or ten persons were sometimes packed. And the food was in keeping with the accommodation.

One day in the summer of 1832 a carriage brought some nuns to Ars ; and the good sisters were at their wits' end to find a lodging, every house being already crammed with pilgrims. It was only at ten o'clock at night that they found shelter by the kindness of a good man who gave up the only room he had ; and in this they extemporised a dormitory by the aid of chairs and mattresses.

But the ever-increasing numbers made it imperative to provide for the most pressing needs. The inhabitants of Ars took the matter in hand, and little by little better and more spacious houses were constructed. The greater part of the buildings near the

church date from that time. A regular service of public conveyances, with offices in Lyons and Ars, was established in 1835, and new roads were laid out. All these improvements, coinciding with the installation of steamers and the better navigation of the Saône, furnished means of transport for the pious visitors, which rapidly enhanced the importance of the Pilgrimage. Thenceforward the movement towards Ars became quasi-European. Every year more than twenty thousand persons began to flock to this obscure village.

St. Philip Neri made a vow never to have a moment he could call his own ; and M. Vianney very soon arrived at the same state.

If St. Simeon Stylites attached himself to a pillar so that, never mind how much he wished it, he could not get beyond the length of his chain nor have any other freedom than that of looking up to heaven and longing to be with his Lord, the Curé of Ars had also his own chain in the souls which bound him to his confessional. From the year 1835 onwards he denied himself all absence—even the most necessary. In that year Mgr. Devie sent him back from the diocesan retreat, and formally forbade him to appear at any future one. “Monsieur le Curé, you are in no need of a retreat,” said he, “and there are souls at Ars who are in need of you.”

Some matters there are which can only be seen in their true light by posterity—so profound and far-reaching are their effects. We venture to think that the Pilgrimage of Ars is one of them. That which is visible and palpable, that which first seizes the imagination and evokes the most admiration and gratitude of contemporaries, is not necessarily the most consoling aspect of the matter, nor the most truly beautiful. And this is emphasised by the words of the holy Curé himself : “Until the Day of Judgment it will never be known how much good has been effected in this privileged little corner of earth.”

CHAPTER XXVII

A RETROSPECT OF TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF THE PILGRIMAGE

And the Lord increased daily together such as should be saved (Acts 11., 47)

It has been said that the holy places are to the world what the stars are to the firmament—sources of light and warmth. For some inscrutable reason our Lord wished to make Ars one of these places of benediction. For more than twenty years this little village of our Dombes has witnessed the reproduction of all the scenes of the Thebaid. Those whom the instinct of faith and veneration, necessities of soul and body, or simply the desire to admire and linger in the presence of the good and beautiful, led there day by day, departed filled with an enthusiasm wholly uncontrollable. Their expressions of delight recalled the cries that once resounded on the banks of the Nile: “I have seen Elias . . . I have seen John in the desert . . . I have seen Paul in Paradise!” Rarely is it given to us to feel the presence of God in His creatures; as a rule, creatures hide Him from us more than they reveal Him: it is the infirmity of our heart and senses. But during the brief periods passed at the feet of the holy Curé of Ars God was as plainly visible as the image of the sun in clear water.

“I live on my memories of Ars” (wrote a pilgrim); “And I often ask what I can do to show my gratitude to God for having led me to go there.”

“I have often been to Ars” (wrote another), “and I have always brought away the most profound impressions with me; but this time I was able to make my confession and receive Holy Communion from the hands of the holy priest, and it seems to me as if all the troubles of my life had become as nothing . . .”

In a letter written by a man from Nantes we find:—

“I have talked much to my neighbours about the pilgrimage I made to the holy Curé. I consulted my director on the subject, and he replied: ‘Talk as much as you please. The marvels of Ars cannot be too widely known. It is for the greater glory of God.’ So I do it, but with as much discretion as possible. It is eight years since the president of the Conference of St. Donatus was at Ars, and he remembers the holy Curé as though he were there now. The bursar of the Greater Seminary returned home enchanted—rapt to the Third Heaven.”

After a second journey to Ars the same pilgrim wrote:—

“I am back again, disseminating what I have gathered together. And what a harvest! It will be long ere my recollec-

tions of this great Saint pass away. I think they have already borne fruit within and around me . . . You are condemned to hear from me often ; but the fault is not mine. My pilgrimages to Ars have done me so much good that I am like a vessel that is never exhausted, however much may be drawn from it . . . ”

Another wrote to us :—

“ . . . Without doubt there is always an enormous influx into your privileged parish. I cannot get over my admiration at the remembrance of all I saw . . . What a multitude ! what earnestness ! what veneration ! . . . How difficult it was to choose the best time to approach M. Vianney ! what efforts one had to make to get to him ! This is quite miraculous, and recalls ancient times . . . ”

“ . . . I went to Ars rather out of curiosity ; but besides that I was persuaded I should find matter for edification. I made no mistake. I must say that what I saw infinitely surpassed all that I had heard ; and it has made the greatest impression on me. I returned a much firmer believer than I went . . . How can one doubt the existence of an order of things superior to those one is accustomed to in the presence of a man so superior to the men one knows . . . At Ars, the reality of the supernatural stares one in the face . . . The more I reflect on what I have seen and heard at Ars, the more firmly am I convinced that God wishes that His Saint should be known during his life, and above all by those who have to instruct others, for everything about him proves the truth of religion. He sees to me like a torch lighted in the Church to enlighten the people and bring them back to the purity and simplicity of the Gospel.

“ At Ars one assisted at the scenes in the life of our Lord. In the things that happen there—with the single exception of the resurrection of the dead—may be recognised nearly all the miracles recorded in Scripture : the conversion of sinners, the cure of the blind, the deaf and the dumb, multiplication of bread, wine and corn. The strife of the holy man with devils proves their existence ; and if devils exist there must be a hell. In our country to-day this capital and essential truth is regarded, even by good people, more as a legend useful to frighten children. At Ars, the demonstration, real, palpable, daily, almost familiar, places it beyond question. The miracle of the Sacred Host—which I heard twice from the lips of M. le Curé—and the numerous cures that took place at the Holy Table, amply suffice to prove the Real Presence of our Lord.

“ As far as I am concerned, our good Saint is a living demonstration of the truth of religion. The life of Jesus Christ and His saints is repeated in him. Perhaps you will say that I am led away by enthusiasm. No, it is gratitude. I was much to be pitied when I doubted all these things ! It seems as if I could never be sufficiently grateful to God for the grace He gave me on

the day he deigned to lead me to Ars. I would like to be able to say as much to all incredulous people.

"I am pleased to hear of the wonderful things which you have the good fortune to witness: they are passing strange; but when one enters upon this order of things nothing should be surprising, since the two Powers concerned are beyond all ordinary methods of investigation. It is, as you remark, a hand to hand conflict with hell. It would appear as if the devil, furious at his impotence against the good Saint, hurls himself at anything he finds near him, as he did last year, when he broke and pounded as in a mortar the crystal holy-water stoup hung over the head of his bed."

The missionary attached to help M. Vianney in his labours wrote thus to a pilgrim to Ars:—

"To tell you that persons of every rank are arriving here, sick of every sort, sinners of every calibre who are finding the road to heaven once again, is only to tell you what you so often saw yourself. As to the holy Curé, his existence is a miracle in itself, more and more evident as time progresses, which forces the least credulous to exclaim: 'The finger of God is here!'"

An individual who, after long and frequent visits to Ars, ended by establishing herself there, wrote to one of her friends:—

"I have the happiness of living under the crook of the holy pastor. What an amount of good he does! You know that; you who never lose a single drop of the dew that falls on this new Land of Promise . . . In spite of the bad weather, pilgrims are arriving from great distances. Some of them come from Nantes, Rennes and from provinces as far off as Brittany. During the vacation we have had from ten to fifteen priests here every day. Religious of both sexes, of every description in every sort of habit, come from the four quarters of the earth. The influx of pilgrims has never been so great."

A Curé wrote from Cette:—

"I really think that all my parish will end by making the Pilgrimage. A caravan of them leaves on Thursday. Our two dear invalids grow better and better since their journey. As regards myself, I am enchanted with my stay in the vicinity of the holy Curé. What good those eight days have done me! . . . It will be an ineffable and everlasting remembrance. I love and esteem everyone who devoutly approaches our Saint."

It is not our intention to make this book a history of the Pilgrimage. Later on, we hope, the most interesting events connected with it will find a historian. At the present moment (1861) the materials for such a work are not to hand. The missionaries only came to Ars in 1853. They had been preceded by the Abbé Raymond, who was assistant to the holy Curé for ten years. Before 1843 M. Vianney was alone, without having anybody either to help him or take note of what passed. It can easily

be imagined that the remembrance of many events has been lost and that many others passed unnoticed. Perhaps one day the love and gratitude of the pilgrims will urge them to publish the benefits they received and to give some account of the prodigies they saw. We confine ourself to tracing the aspects of the Pilgrimage as they appeared to us for the first time in the year 1848.

It has to be borne in mind that this was an epoch peculiar to itself. The logic of passions long restrained and retarded in their course brought about the inevitable consequences of the principles with which the preceding *regime* had been inaugurated. Terrible problems which had been temporarily shelved now presented themselves for solution ; and a period of extremes supervened. Then the incredulous France of 1830, horrified at the results of a catastrophe which she herself had prepared, was seen to turn instinctively to the Church, and entreat the protection of her doctrines and the safeguard of her influence.

Ars took a large part in this momentary triumph of good. The charity of the servant of God, his wisdom, his prayers, were the shield and resource of many a troubled soul in the darkest days of this unhappy time. People looked to him as to a light-house in the storm. Round this poor little country Curé might be seen eminent personages, fresh from councils at which the destinies of France were discussed. One of the foremost magistrates of the Republic, whose name will always be connected with one of the most important judicial episodes of the century, came to Ars, made a retreat, and did not depart till he had fulfilled all the duties of a Christian life.

It has been computed that by the omnibuses alone, which put Ars into communication with the Saône and the railway station at Villefranche, more than eighty thousand people arrived in the course of an ordinary year. Whence came these floods of strangers ? From everywhere : from every province of France, from Belgium, England, Germany. Who had called them hither ? Nobody, save those who had been and had seen ; for the newspapers said nothing about the Curé of Ars, and did not say anything until after his death.

And we may remark that this multitude was a little world in itself. It comprised representatives of every class, rank, and condition. The poor, habituated to pain and suffering, elbowed the rich who had vainly endeavoured to keep these out of their lives. These last brought their offerings, the others asked alms ; all implored the cure of either body or soul. The lame, the blind, the deaf, epileptics, the mentally afflicted, sick of all sorts, made a hundred and two hundred leagues on foot to get here, buoyed up by an invincible confidence. Considerations of space preclude our describing more minutely the long train of sufferers ; besides which we should be fearful that by doing so we might give the impression that the design of God in this Pilgrimage was

to cure the body ; whereas the conversion of sinners was the work *par excellence* of M. Vianney. Everything beyond that was merely accessory, and tended to the one end.

The actual presence of the sick was not always necessary. St. Philomena and the Curé of Ars exerted their powers at a distance on occasions. Those who were too weak, too poor, or too far off, appealed to the Good Physician of heaven above by commending themselves to the wonder-worker of earth below from every country to which his fame had penetrated ; and afterwards came, full of life and joy, to discharge their obligations in the sanctuary of the humble village. It was in favour of these poor sick and helpless souls that St. Philomena endowed the oil from the lamp that burned before her altar with the virtue of healing.

The great flocked to Ars as well as those of lesser degree, and for the same reason—that the hand of God or man had struck them. Widows and orphans, happy and unhappy, youth full of illusions and old age sobered by experience ; men disgusted with the world and women weary of frivolity ; but above all, sinners presented themselves in crowds, attracted by a virtue and a wisdom alike supernatural in their eyes. We may also add to the list many who were simply curious and some incredulous. Startling contrasts were found as well as extraordinary combinations—virtue in the midst of vice, pitiable misery under prosperous exteriors, situations from which no issue was possible save by the way of Calvary ; misfortunes hopeless without the help of heaven.

The Curé of Ars beheld every day and all day an interminable procession of sick and stricken defile before his eyes—victims of the changes and chances of this mortal life, the key-note of which is ever sadness ; and when the evening came, and he was back in his room in company of the missionaries, his affliction of heart found vent. “One must come to Ars,” he said, with tears, “in order to know what sin is, and to appreciate the harm that Adam has wrought in his unfortunate family. One knows not what to do ! One can only pray and weep.”

The multitude understood the value of the benefits whereof M. Vianney was the dispenser ; and it is impossible to do more than convey an idea of their eagerness to obtain them. Early-riser as was the servant of God, the pilgrims were beforehand with him and awaited his arrival at the door of the church. Numbers passed the night in the porch, so as to be certain of not missing him. Custom established a code of rules ; and the arrival of each determined his place in the rank. But certain privileged persons there were ; sometimes M. Vianney called them to him from the midst of the crowd. People—among whom, for sufficient reasons we number ourself—alleged that the discernment of the *good Father* showed him those who could not wait, or who had been drawn to Ars by needs more serious or necessities more pressing than the rest.



From a Painting by M. Borel, of Lyons.

Villand-l'erna, Phot., Ars (lin).

The Curé summons those to Confession who cannot prolong their stay.

Not seldom the pilgrims themselves resorted to divers little artifices to get into the presence of the holy Curé the sooner. They would employ the very human means of making interest with the missionaries, the Brothers of the Holy Family, their landlords or landladies—anybody, male or female, who had to do with the parish.

“Monsieur l’abbé” (wrote a priest from Brittany), “although your holy Curé makes no acceptance of persons, perhaps a pious ruse to make way to his confessional might not displease him. Be so kind therefore as to show the bearer of this letter the quickest way of gaining a few minutes’ interview with him. Like the Phœnician woman, she is convinced that she has but to touch the hem of his garment in order to be cured. Poverty notwithstanding, she is undertaking a long and expensive journey; and the spirit of faith counts for much in her desire to be healed . . .”

The Sous-Préfet of Trévoux, although his official rank might have given him some title to consideration, wrote to a missionary at Ars :—

“The Bishop of Belley has authorised me to request that when Madame Charbonnier goes to ask the prayers of the holy Curé of Ars you will be so kind as to obtain a speedy hearing for her . . .”

Supernatural means were also employed—and many assert with success. They had addressed themselves to the good angel of M. Vianney and enlisted him in their cause. The holy Curé would then leave his confessional and come straight to them; or perhaps some happy and unforeseen accident would place them in his path and lead to the same result. But outside these recognised methods such favours were of rare occurrence; M. Vianney would not lend himself to them. His preferences—when he showed any—were for the poor and the unhappy.

One day a lady of rank arrived at Ars in her carriage, which drew up at the door of the church. Entering hurriedly, and addressing the people who blocked the way to the little chapel where the Curé was hearing confessions in a tone of authority, she commanded them to make way. After being vehement and persuasive by turns—both without effect—she sought out the missionary. “Monsieur l’abbé, it is incredible! Here have I been for a full quarter-of-an-hour trying to make my way to the confessional of M. le Curé—impossible to get through the crowd! I am not fond of ante-chambers; I wait neither at the court of Bavaria nor at that of the Pope.” “I am extremely sorry, Madame,” replied the Abbé, coolly, “but I really can do nothing at all to help you; and you will have to wait at Ars.” Madame la Comtesse resigned herself to do the same as ordinary mortals—watch for the moment when M. Vianney should leave his confessional. Then she advanced and, with an air and tone that unconsciously betrayed her, said to him: “Monsieur le Curé, I have come to make my confession to you.” “’Tis well, Madame,”

replied the good Curé, with a smile that was significant and maybe the least bit malicious, "'Tis very well! . . . We have heard confessions before."

A young woman, accompanied by her husband, tried to force a passage and get in out of turn. She was followed by indignant murmurs, not to say outspoken remonstrances—a miniature uproar, which caused the Curé to put his head out of the door of his confessional. Just at that moment the impatient couple, by liberal use of their elbows right and left, had succeeded in reaching the chapel of St. John.

"What is the matter, my friend?" asked the holy Curé, with his wonted placidity. "It is my wife," replied the husband, "who wants to make her confession."

"Very well! she will come in her turn." "But, Monsieur le Curé," said the lady, petulantly, "I cannot wait." "I am exceedingly sorry, Madame; but, were you the Empress herself, you must wait your proper turn."

Among such a number of pilgrims as came to Ars it was only to be expected that some would be found whose only motive was curiosity. The crowd follows the crowd, and wanders in search of sensation. Consequently M. Vianney suffered much from the attentions of lion-hunters, as also from the vagaries of those vain or eccentric persons whose mission in life it seems to be to harass the life of any celebrity who may come in their way. But such triflers were dismissed instantaneously, and with a refinement of humble politeness that left neither hope of success nor temptation to return to the charge. For example: "It was hardly worth while to take such pains to see so little," or: "You will not be so pleased as was the Queen of Saba; nor will you say afterwards: 'What I have seen surpasses all that I have heard'—in this case it will be quite the other way about."

As a rule these journeys to Ars were made with far higher motives. People came to ask advice and prayers, to seek peace of mind and the grace of God. They were welcome when they brought sincere doubts to be cleared away, serious difficulties to be solved, complications to be unravelled, sorrows to be consoled, wounds to be bound up—more than all, when they brought sins to be forgiven. Then the good Curé showed himself sympathetic, affectionate and cordial; the interests of his clients immediately became his own, and he would shed genuine tears over their misfortunes. With him, forgetfulness of self in order to think of others was an instinct; and it excited the more gratitude because he never seemed to expect any. Having no interests of his own to serve, he was free to enter into those of his neighbour, which his charity adopted in their place. He carried this interest even to solicitude; and his own heart—usually so peaceful and unruffled—was sometimes troubled in consequence. His supreme delight was to encounter now and then saintly souls whose aspira-

tions raised them above the sordid details of everyday life, who were overcome by divine love, lost in their desire of heaven ; and in his estimation much better than himself. Such he discerned immediately ; he felt drawn towards them and found rest in their company—in which he regarded himself as a disciple in a school of virtue, where it was his business to be enlightened, converted and confounded. With them he was more on his own ground and in his proper element—further from men and nearer to God.

It is interesting to reflect on the conflicting feelings that moved individual members of those great crowds, composed chiefly of sick and sinners supernaturally cured or converted, restored to health of soul and body. Here a man has, as though by instinct, struck his breast and cast himself on his knees ; there the soul had re-asserted itself in the joy of the present, mingled with a chastened sorrow for the past. Here were those who had never been moved to enter into themselves elsewhere, and had now found light, help and strength in the inexhaustible benevolence of one who by his sympathy had seemed to be almost a kindred spirit. Nothing breeds confidence like confidence ; and it was aroused at Ars naturally by the sense of security that the *good Father* shed on all around him. And just as in those privileged spots where divine Providence—often unrecognised as such—endows the waters of the locality with curative properties, all conversation turns on the ills of the body, so at Ars it turned on the infirmities of the soul and the misfortunes and unhappiness to which they led their victims. Here new friendships were formed and correspondence established as pleasurable as they were durable. Christians were instantly drawn together : at the first look, the first salutation, the first word, all felt the fraternal bond of the same faith and the same love. It only required a little goodwill and good-manners thenceforward to cause relations from which all suspicion had been banished to become intimate.

Having been attracted to Ars by the fame of the wonders there worked, sinners were kept there by the indescribable charm of the place. The unbeliever was as powerless to withstand this charm as he was to ignore it. The stranger led hither by chance or caprice was as sensible of it as the devout pilgrim drawn by hope and love. This charm went straight to the heart, to gladden it if pure, to renew it if guilty. There was in the very atmosphere of this little village something at once indefinable and celestial, which penetrated soul and body ; reflecting in the calm and well-being of the one the peace and serenity of the other. Even amid the commotion caused by the arrival of some dozen or so public conveyances, there was an air of peace and silence that predisposed to graver thoughts. Nothing here resembled anything that is seen elsewhere. Everybody seemed restful, the conversation was serious, even animation when it obtained did not preclude recollection. One was no longer in France, nor in the nineteenth

century. Rather would one have imagined oneself back in one of those great monasteries of the Middle Ages, on the threshold of which all the sights and sounds of earth vanish from the senses.

The landscape itself contributed to encourage religious impressions by its harmony and tranquillity. These became more accentuated as the church and presbytery were approached, since they appeared to be the source whence all proceeded. One was penetrated from the very first as by a soothing influence over the inner man. Mental and moral suffering seemed to be assuaged, bitterness and passion took to flight. All the pettinesses of everyday life were forgotten; and nothing was felt save the soul's protest against evil and a vehement desire to combat it within and without. In fact one would have wished nothing better than to live and die here. Sundry persons of various conditions were not content to wish this, for they actually left their home and friends, to bury themselves in this solitude under the shadow of its sanctity and prepare themselves for the next world. It was not without emotion that we read on a wooden cross, surmounting the grave of a stranger who had died at Ars, this beautiful inscription: UBI CRUX, IBI PATRIA (Where the Cross is, there is one's country).

CHAPTER XXVIII

A DAY WITH THE CURÉ OF ARS

"Why doth all the world run after thee, and each one seem anxious to see, hear and obey thee? Thou art not handsome; thou hast no great learning; nor art thou noble . . . how then, doth it come about that all the world runneth after thee?"

"It is entirely due to the designs of Almighty God. Since no greater or more unworthy sinner, nor any more contemptible creature than myself could be found to accomplish the work that He had in view, He hath made choice of me, to put the greatness, science, strength and beauty of the world to confusion." (Fioretti, Br. Masseo to St. Francis).

HAD we written the ensuing chapter ourself we might have been taxed with exaggeration; for the bare facts are hardly credible; and these thirty years—of which each one was like all the others, without relaxation or repose—are to a reflecting mind the most remarkable and miraculous facts in the history of the Curé of Ars. 'Twere better to leave the recital to pilgrims who have published their impressions and whose testimony will corroborate our own.

A gentleman who does honour to his university by his learning, high principles, purity of doctrine and the ardour of his religious convictions, M. Louis Lacroix, professor of literature at Nancy, came to Ars in the autumn of 1857. He had the privilege of seeing and speaking to M. Vianney, as well as of contemplating the spectacle of the virtues that were the edification of all. On his return home he felt constrained to relate what he had seen, and how the Curé of Ars passed his days. To this effect M. Lacroix:—

"Two years ago I resolved to devote part of my vacation to a visit to Rome—and *en chrétien*; for I had not known that city as it should be known—nobody does who has not made his journey there *ad limina*. During a stay of some days in Paris before my departure I met one of my friends. He writes on spiritual subjects, being an intelligent and sincere Christian whose signature appears beneath sundry excellent articles in our periodical reviews; and I naturally discussed my projects with him. He entered into them warmly, 'but,' he added, 'since you are going this time in the character of a pilgrim, it were a pity to confine your pilgrimage to the end of your journey. Why not make one at the beginning, and, since you are passing through Lyons, go and see the Curé of Ars? It will not take you out of your way; indeed it will hardly detain you; and you will see what you may search for in vain, for it can be seen nowhere else.'

"My friend had seen the Curé of Ars; but I had only heard of him vaguely by repute, and not at all from those who had seen him themselves. He spoke of all he had seen at Ars, and in such

a manner as to excite my curiosity, concluding his animated recital by reflections that decided me completely: 'You study history and you teach it; you are therefore bound to try to understand it and master all its secrets. Go to Ars then, and there you will learn how Christianity was established; how the peoples were converted; and how Christian civilisation was founded. There is a man there in whom is found all the creative action of the saints of bygone ages; who makes Christians as did the Apostles; who is held in veneration by the people as was St Bernard; and in whom are seen all the wonders that we only know from books. Go and see him; speak with him if you can get near enough, for he is much beset. If you can do no more, look at him, and you will find your time has not been thrown away. When one has the good fortune to be contemporaneous with such a prodigy one must not shut one's eyes to it and pass by on the other side. The learned often put themselves to much inconvenience to observe phenomena which are not always worth the trouble they give. This one is the greatest and rarest in the whole world, for it is sanctity in full activity. In your capacity of historian you cannot dispense yourself from studying it. Go to Ars, then; do not fail to go, but go as soon as you can, for the Curé of Ars will not last much longer.'

"I felt my spiritually-minded friend was right, and resolved to follow his advice. So, instead of going on to Lyons, I stopped at Villefranche. Hardly had I got there, and while I was thinking of climbing the long steep street to visit the church which seemed well worth an inspection, than the gathering clouds poured out such a deluge of rain as forced me to take shelter in the office of the omnibus-company which conducts the service between Villefranche and Ars—to which place the fame of the Abbé Vianney draws an ever-increasing number of visitors. (I note the circumstance of the rain purposely). At the appointed time we set out, the rain continuing to fall in torrents. Not a soul to be seen on the roads; it had rained at frequent intervals since yesterday. Good! said I, there will be no crowd round the Curé of Ars to-day. I shall miss the sight of the populace thronging to see him; but I shall be able to approach and speak with him without undue delay.

Thus reflecting, I arrived at Ars. The omnibus set us down at a good village inn, where one is well treated and not as yet imposed upon. They told me the Curé forbade it and that he is obeyed. As I am well aware of the difficulty of moderating the exactions of inn-keepers, especially in places of pilgrimage, this was an indication—the first one—of the influence the holy man exerts over the hearts of his people. When we had established ourselves we hastened to the church, where they said we should find M. le Curé. On the way I arranged my programme. The omnibus had brought everyone, I thought; there was no other means of getting here;

our party were the only visitors, and in the innocence of my heart, I pictured the good Curé as even now awaiting us. In short, while I was well disposed to be touched and edified, I took a little too much for granted and was by no means prepared for what I was about to see. A new proof of a truth of which every traveller has often occasion to be convinced. If one would know, one must see—see for oneself as far as possible, or only rely on trustworthy evidence. And the wonders of Ars are an experience I would not have forgone on any account, so highly do I esteem the privilege of being able to describe them faithfully.

“I entered the church then, with an eager curiosity, which was perhaps a little wanting in the gravity due. Judge of my astonishment! Instead of the solitude I had anticipated, I found the church filled with a numerous and recollected crowd—the women dispersed in groups in the nave; the men in serried ranks at the entrance of and round about the choir; everybody silent and calm in an attitude of meditation or prayer. Never had ante-chamber of king or minister of state impressed me with such a sense of grandeur and majesty; and I understood at once all the dignity of this humble minister of the King of heaven and earth, to whom his sanctity lent so much power and brought so many clients. Meanwhile I looked round for him and found him not. Someone pointed to the door of the sacristy, where they said he was hearing the confessions of the men. He was now receiving those who had arrived the evening before. It was five o'clock in the afternoon. Evidently I had no chance of seeing the Curé of Ars that day, as I was the last link in the chain which began at the sacristy door. But I did not complain; I was struck with the beauty of the scene which it had been given me to contemplate and I felt pleased to be able to observe how the Curé of Ars ended his day, being determined to come next morning to see how he began it.

“Still the Abbé Vianney continued to be invisible. The door of the sacristy opened and closed regularly on the penitents or consultants who followed one another to the tribunal of the holy priest. I noticed them go in recollected, absorbed, anxious, and come out calm, joyous and bright. One of them, a young artisan, passing close to me, suddenly stopped and struck his forehead: ‘Ah! *mon Dieu!*’ he muttered, ‘I have something more to say to him; I must see him again!’ And he took his place at the end of the line, to get another turn in the course of a day or two.

“More than two hours passed rapidly in this fashion. I had lost all sense of time, for the scene before me filled the soul with thoughts of things divine and eternal, and time is nothing but a succession of things that pass away. Night drew on; it was now close on eight o'clock. The church, far from emptying, had received fresh visitors and was now completely full. They said

it was time for night prayers, at which, as well as at Mass in the morning, the villagers failed not to be present, for the sanctity of their Curé had brought them all back to the practice of their duties. At that moment M. Vianney came out to go to the pulpit. The sight of him made me forget everything else—I had no eyes for anyone but him. He was in his surplice, which indeed he never lays aside. His whole exterior bears witness to his extraordinary virtues and sanctity. His face and person were extremely thin, attesting the sublime and awful work of mortification and asceticism, whence results what Bossuet calls that horrible annihilation of the whole man—horrible to nature, but beautiful in the order of grace; for what it kills in the one it brings forth in the other. That body so frail and already bent seemed grand and majestic. He walked with his head bowed and his eyes on the ground; his long hair flowed over his neck, encircling his face with a sort of white aureola. I felt a thrill go through me as he passed close to and I touched the hem of his surplice. When he had ascended the pulpit all knelt and he recited the night prayers, but in so feeble a voice that only a confused murmur of sounds reached my ear. One felt it was the voice of a man thoroughly worn out; and that makes his indefatigable assiduity in the church and confessional more wonderful still—he spends whole days and nights there. The prayers ended, he descended, crossed the church and went out by a side-door and—still bare-headed and in his surplice—returned to his house between two rows of the faithful kneeling and whom he blessed as he passed.

“I had witnessed the ascendancy of the Curé of Ars over his fellow-men; I had felt it interiorly on myself: the essential point of my visit to Ars was gained. Evidently the Abbé Vianney was no ordinary man, since he had drawn around him in this out-of-the-way village of Bresse as great a concourse as could have been found in the most famous pilgrimages. I had seen that; I had sufficient evidence to bear my testimony, and I could have taken my departure. But it would have cost me a pang to leave without having spoken to the holy priest and received his blessing. I asked what I must do in order to interview the Curé of Ars. A man who kept order in the church—and whom I took to be the sacristan—assured me that if I came at four o’clock I might be able to see him in the course of the morning and leave the same day. I promised myself to be very punctual at the rendezvous.

“In the meantime everybody returned home. The peasants from the neighbouring villages went back. All the houses in Ars received guests who wished to prolong their stay. I regained my inn, where I found my omnibus-companions, to wit, a lady from Besançon and her daughter, a priest from Grenoble, two seminarians from Lyons, a chaplain from Marseilles, a lady from the same place with her two daughters—one dumb, the other lame—and another family of three from Marseilles. This influx from

Marseilles was explained by the fame of a miracle obtained six weeks before by the Curé of Ars in favour of a person from that city. The conversation at supper turned exclusively on the extraordinary man we had come to contemplate. Everyone expressed admiration and gave his or her impressions in their own way. 'Ah! I am glad I came,' said the man from Marseilles, who spoke with an accent that denoted an inhabitant of Canebière. 'It is all the doing of my family. I myself was not anxious to come, but they insisted. But I am glad I came; I know now what religion is.' And one felt that the good man thought more than he said, and was quite prepared to carry his impressions to their natural conclusion.

"Next day—Friday, 11th September, 1857—I was up at four o'clock, and hastened to the church before daylight. I thought I should get there as soon as or even before anybody else; but the same surprise as yesterday was in store for me—and even a greater one. Already a great crowd had assembled, and, to my great disappointment, I only got a place far distant from the blessed door which gave access to the Curé; and I found myself, like Moses, destined to behold from afar, but powerless to enter.

"'How long have you been here?' asked I of the neighbours whom chance had given me. 'Since two o'clock.' 'And M. le Curé, when did he come in?' 'He came at midnight.' 'Where is he? What's he doing now?' 'In the confessional, down there behind the choir; he is hearing the women's confessions just now. He usually does this on Friday morning. He won't see the men till after Mass.' 'What are all these men doing here then?' 'Keeping their place, so as to get in in their turn.' 'What time did they come.' 'When the Curé came himself. They were waiting at the door, the first-comer holding the handle; at midnight the church was opened and they took their place.'

"This surpassed all I had seen the night before; I was stupefied. I know well that men are capable of prodigious exertions where their pleasures or their interests are concerned; that they will stand for hours together in a queue to get a good seat in a theatre; I have also known them to wait days and nights in the Rue Quincampoix to buy Mississippi Bonds. But what I did not know and what I had never seen before was that men could bring themselves to make the same sacrifice of time and rest in order to obtain purely spiritual benefits. It was a new light for me, and seemed more like a scene from the Gospel. It went to my heart, and moved me even to tears. So I gave myself up—as on the previous evening—to the pleasure of seeing, to forgetfulness of time, to the delights of prayer and meditation in this atmosphere of spiritual and religious life which the great servant of God infused into everything around him.

"At the same time I felt a little cross with the sacristan of the night before, in that he had not warned me of the necessity of

passing the night at the church-door, and so had relegated me to such a back place. I looked at him askance—for he was early at his post—going and coming, placing the fresh arrivals, replying to everyone, soothing the impatient without ever becoming impatient himself. Struck by his tranquillity and perfect manners, I made enquiries concerning him of those about me. I then learned that this seeming sacristan was a gentleman of position, who, cured and converted by the Curé of Ars, had devoted himself out of gratitude and piety to the painful and thankless office he was carrying out so well. He had become the auxiliary of the holy Curé, by maintaining order and supervising the church while the latter heard confessions. With a Curé who sits in the confessional for some twenty hours out of the twenty-four this is no light undertaking; and the discovery was a fresh light for me. I began to understand how the saints, who do the impossible, have the faculty of inspiring others to attempt the same; and how, by their doing what they do with abnegation, complete self-sacrifice and boundless love of God and their neighbour, they are really the most active, most efficient and most beneficent of men.

“At six the Vicaire came in to say his Mass, during which the Curé continued to hear the women’s confessions. Then on towards seven, after a sitting—deadly for anyone else—which had lasted since midnight, he left the confessional with his habitual air of calm and repose, and went to the sacristy to vest for Mass. As for me, pre-occupied with the idea of speaking for an instant with him, asking his benediction and getting away the same day, I had made an effort and had succeeded in slipping into the sacristy at the same moment as the Vicaire re-entered it. ‘Stay here,’ he had said, ‘till M. le Curé comes in; perhaps he will consent to hear you before he goes to the altar.’ I had followed this recommendation, but without success. The Curé of Ars, who judges of the state and needs of a soul by a glance, did not think it necessary to interrupt his usual routine in order to satisfy my impatience. He put me off, and began to vest. All that I had gained by my attempt was to see him close to, to feel his sweet and piercing glance fixed on myself, and to help him vest for Mass. Then it was that I saw the extreme thinness of that mortified body, which looked like a shadow. But it did not prevent his moving his fragile limbs with a singular vivacity, and imparting an energetic decision to every gesture. I followed him to the altar of St. Philomena, to whom he has a special devotion. There it is that he says his Mass; it is at that altar he has obtained numerous miracles. The ex-votos of all sorts that cover the walls of this chapel attest how many infirmities have there found relief. It was there that, having effected the cure of a paralytic—who straightway arose and walked, as at the word of our Saviour Himself—while all present audibly expressed their admiration and

gratitude, the servant of God, embarrassed at this public manifestation of the efficacy of his prayers, complained to the Saint he had invoked, saying with a humility that betrayed the secret of his power : 'When you grant me such favours as this, let it be in secret ! Cure them at home, and spare my unworthiness such confusion.'

" His Mass finished, I thought the Curé of Ars would now be at liberty ; it was the time he had appointed ; but I was mistaken again. The church was crammed with people ; and the crowd had got in between him and myself in his passage back to the sacristy. I found myself once more reduced to the rôle of spectator, and was thus enabled to see the remainder of his morning's work. He now re-appeared on the steps of the choir, vested in his surplice. The multitude of pilgrims surged towards him at once. A quantity of medals and rosaries were brought for him to bless ; then some children were presented, on whom he laid his hands. When he had satisfied everyone he went into a little sacristy on the right-hand side of the church, where he received, one after another, several ladies who had come to consult him. At the end of an hour he regained the choir once more, and the men's confessions commenced immediately. Every time I had seen him he was too far off for me to reach him ; and thus far he had always escaped me. I was on the point of getting impatient ; but a little reflection made me ashamed of myself, for the sight of this man spending himself with so much devotion and giving all his time to the wants of others showed me how unworthy it was to begrudge a little of my own in order to get near him. It was no difficult task to return to my original state of passive admiration, for the longer I remained in this place the more impressed I became.

" It was now about nine o'clock ; and last night's state of affairs at the door of the sacristy was repeating itself. That door had again become inaccessible to me. Everyone had resumed his place in the rank, and nobody passed out of his proper turn. Exceptions there were : sundry energetic and pushful women managed to get to the door and pass in despite all obstacles, to the great irritation of the rest. Sometimes the Curé himself pointed out a person whom he wished to admit—a preference that excited no resentment. Thus the weak and infirm passed in at once, and everyone saw it was only right that they should do so. When the lady from Marseilles arrived with her two afflicted daughters they had only to await the Curé's first disengaged moment. From time to time a little group gathered in front of the high altar—those whom confession had reconciled to God. The Vicaire appeared, opened the tabernacle and gave them Holy Communion. All these various movements occasioned some little confusion and necessitated a little surveillance ; but the gentleman whom I no longer took for a sacristan and for whom

I felt the greatest respect went from bench to bench, calming everybody and restoring order and peace.

"This sublime work of charity had now been going on for ten hours. He who was the hero of it all had not had a moment's rest nor relaxed his efforts; he was always on the scene and always indefatigable. I was beginning to succumb to hunger and fatigue, though I had arrived four hours later than he, and had done nothing more than look on; and I bethought myself of retiring. But before doing so I determined to deliver a last assault on the inaccessible sacristy. Aided by the obliging auxiliary of the Saint, I contrived to get right up to the door; and when the Curé opened it to admit a fresh penitent he saw me in front of him, appeared to recognise me, and allowed me to enter.

"We stood face to face. Being unwilling to take up too much of the precious time of such a man, I put briefly and rapidly two questions I had prepared. He replied off-hand, with decision, without apparent reflection or the least hesitation, but still without haste; and his answers were models of sound sense, wisdom, and capable of the easiest and most profitable application. Ordinarily men have to reflect and weigh a project maturely before deciding on the best method of proceeding. The Curé of Ars improvised wisdom. I was astonished to find such calmness, such attention, such presence of mind under such conditions. Since midnight he had been beset, as indeed he was now; he had never had an instant's quiet, he had had to reply to hundreds of persons. There was, even at that moment, a man kneeling at the prie-dieu, waiting to begin his confession; outside masses of others surged at the door like the waves on the seashore. And the holy priest was ever at the service of all, giving himself to each without impatience or apparent fatigue, always open-hearted and ready to respond, his fragile person in full activity all the while. Assuredly this was not merely natural; and whoever will reflect for a moment on all these facts will be forced to recognise the intervention of divine grace, elevating the powers of the holy man to the order of the miraculous. He had replied to me in as short a time as I had taken to interrogate him. When he had finished I added: 'One more favour, Father. I am on my way to Rome, to kneel and pray at the tomb of the Apostles. Give me your blessing, that it may accompany me throughout my journey.'

"At the mention of Rome the Abbé Vianney smiled with pleasure. His eyes, lowered till then, raised up; the interior and recollected expression was replaced by a look of vivacity and interest. 'Ah! you are going to Rome: you will see our Holy Father.' And here his countenance showed how much he felt. Then, after a slight pause: 'Well, then! be so kind as to pray for me at the tomb of the Holy Apostles.'

"After this last reply and an interchange of words which lasted, I dare say, hardly five minutes, I knelt; he blessed me; I kissed his hand and withdrew, full of joy, strength and veneration. Nor was I sorry to be at liberty; and I took advantage of it to regain the fresh air and look over the village of Ars, which, as yet, I knew not at all. Nearly all the houses have been turned into hospices for the pilgrims or shops for the sale of articles of piety. In every window various portraits of M. Vianney were exhibited, and I bought the one that seemed to me the most like him. Then I took a turn in the direction of the château, being careful to return to the church after half-an-hour's walk, so as to be present at the catechism, as they called it, of M. le Curé. This was an instruction he was accustomed to give every day just before noon, and for which, after the fatigue and labours of those terrible sittings in the confessional, his insatiable devotion still managed to find the strength. The church was full once more, and I could hardly get back to the choir again. The Curé took his seat on a chair, with his back to the high altar, and the homily commenced.

"Certainly the eloquence of the Curé of Ars does not lie in his speech. Although only a short distance off, I could hardly hear him, for, besides the extreme feebleness of his voice, the total loss of all his teeth has deprived him of all clearness of articulation. But he was eloquent by his appearance, his gestures, and, more than all, by the authority of his life and the ascendancy of his works. And what a power he exercised over his audience! This was the last and most impressive scene of all. The crowd gathered round him: at his feet, on the altar-steps, on the pavement of the choir, pressed people of all ages, both sexes and every condition—above all, women with their children—the whole absorbed in breathless attention, with outstretched neck and eyes rivetted on his person. If he could not be heard it was sufficient to see him, for his exterior made everything clear, so much expression was there in his gesture, in his eyes and in his whole appearance! He shuddered with horror when he spoke of sin; he wept when he thought of offences against God; he seemed enraptured when he talked of divine love: he grew red and pale by turns. His language was easy and abundant. He spoke to us of the end of man, which is happiness in God. Sin takes us away from God; sorrow and penance bring us back to Him. This was his daily theme, and he developed it with all his heart. I repeat: we heard very little, but we felt it all. From time to time one caught some such beautiful thought as this: 'It is a strange thing; I have met plenty of people who repented them of not having loved God; never have I met one who was sorry or repented of having loved Him.' It was not an eloquence that strikes and subdues, but an unction that warms and penetrates. Like St. John, he constantly repeated the words 'My children,' and the multitude listened as

to a venerated father. It is here that a painter should come, if he would find a setting for the Sermon on the Mount.

"Twelve o'clock struck as the Curé of Ars ceased to speak and returned to his presbytery, there to seek in prayer and mortification the strength to recommence in two or three hours his life of immolation and sacrifice. As for myself, at the end of an hour I had left Ars, bearing with me as a treasure the blessing of the Abbé Vianney, and the ineffaceable memory of the marvels of sanctity and charity I had witnessed there. I had seen no special miracle, but I had seen the ordinary miracle of his life, of which every day was a repetition of this one.

"I arrived in Lyons the same evening, and immediately entered in my diary all that I had seen; and it is these notes, exact and faithful, that form the substance of the account I give to the public. There are the facts. I could add a commentary, and endeavour to aid the reader to a right understanding of the grandeur of the Catholic priesthood, which can, in its members, attain to such a degree of perfection; to a due appreciation of the beneficent influence of the Church on souls—and consequently on society—by her unceasing counteraction of the effects of ignorance, error and vice. I could say much on these inexhaustible subjects. But 'twere better to leave each one to meditate on the story for himself and draw the obvious conclusion. It is sufficient for me to give the facts: my duty as historian is fulfilled and I say no more.

"Happy should I be if—in consecrating these pages to the venerated memory of the Curé of Ars, in making known a single passage of his sublime and saintly career, in showing that the work of his life was supereminently the treatment and cure of souls—I could contribute to the knowledge and diffusion of the glory of this great servant of God, to the consolation of Christian hearts by the spectacle of the return of sanctity to this earth, and to the bringing home to our century—afflicted with every malady that can attack the soul—the fact that confession is the remedy for each of and all our ills. Thanks to the Curé of Ars, whose mission it has been to be the great and potent confessor of our time, this holy institution of the Church stands out from the works of his life triumphant and victorious, rescued from the contempt of indifference, vindicated from the objections of sophistry, and avenged in a striking manner for all the outrages of incredulity."

CHAPTER XXIX

SHOWING HOW THE VENERATION AND CONFIDENCE OF THE PUBLIC
IN M. VIANNEY WERE ATTESTED BY THE LETTERS RECEIVED
FROM EVERY COUNTRY IN THE WORLD

For not he who commendeth himself is approved, but he whom God commendeth. (II. Cor. x., 18.)

EVERY day at post-time the little oak table of M. Vianney—which is still to be seen in his room—was covered with a mass of letters from the four quarters of the globe. M. Vianney perused as many as was possible during the course of his meal. Some of them commenced in laudatory style, e.g., "The great reputation that you have acquired for sanctity . . ." "The profound veneration in which I hold you . . ." "The esteem that you have inspired in me . . ." "The confidence I have in your enlightenment . . ." These never got read; the holy Curé put them behind the fire forthwith with a movement of indignation. There was no surer way of being disregarded than to commence with compliments.

Some of these letters enclosed remittances for novenas of Masses, for the poor or the works of the Curé of Ars. When they were confidential he destroyed them then and there; when they were not and entered into protracted explanations of important matters he caused notes to be taken of their contents.

This summary scrutiny of his correspondence lasted as long as he was occupied with his repast. Letters that had not been inspected by the end of it ran some risk of not being opened at all.

It is to be deplored that so many autographs should have been lost. A part of the history we are writing—and perhaps the most interesting part—has perished with them. Nothing could have served us so well to show the universal influence of the servant of God, the prestige he enjoyed even in the most distant localities, and the confidence of which he was the object wherever his name had penetrated. Among the rare specimens of this correspondence that we have been able to preserve are some that have been of the greatest possible assistance to us in the analysis of the character of M. Vianney, and the appreciation of the admirable powers of consolation, intercession and conversion that were so manifest in him. The revelations they contain give cause for regret that so small a number should have escaped the *auto-da-fé* that devoured the remainder.

With immense labour we have examined this collection—which, though an insignificant fraction of the total, is still huge—in order to present to our readers the most characteristic and interest-

ing fragments. Several of the letters are in English or German, but the bulk of them bear French postmarks.

This correspondence is a new edition of the lament of Job, in that it is an echo of all the sighs and groans of earth. It amply bears out the words of the Curé of Ars : " One must come here to understand what original sin is."

In general the letters addressed to M. Vianney were requests for prayers. Many of them came from West Flanders, and notably from the diocese of Bruges. These give touching evidence of the piety of the Belgian clergy and of their confidence in the servant of God. Thus the Dean of St. Giles :—

" Bruges, 5th April, 1853.

" Mon très révérend Curé,

" In remembrance of the relics of St. Francis of Sales, which I had the pleasure of confiding to your care four years ago, and by the charity of that holy Bishop, I humbly beg a memento before God to obtain the restoration of the health of a sick lady, if such be best for her ; and if not, patience, resignation and a happy death.

" I take this opportunity of commending myself and my flock to your prayers ; and to renew the expression of my respect for yourself."

Another Belgian priest wrote on 19th May, 1853 :—

" . . . A respected member of our parish has lately been seized with such a terrible illness that the doctors only gave him a few hours to live. Knowing his faith, and out of pity for his wife and three little children, I suspended from his neck a medal blessed by the Curé of Ars and we began a novena to St. Philomena. On the ninth day the patient was able to sit up in an arm-chair and since then his state, although grave, has grown better. Knowing how many cures have been obtained by the prayers of M. Vianney, I would ask you to make the case known to your venerable Curé, and entreat him to make a novena of special prayers on behalf of the dear invalid, who is still in the prime of life."

On 14th December, 1854, they wrote again from Bruges, to obtain the cure of a young man, " the sole heir to a great name and an immense fortune, destined to perpetuate the traditions of charity and Christian virtue of one of the most honourable families of Belgium." They asked for a novena of Masses from M. Vianney, begging him to name the day they would commence, " so that at the same moment the various Religious Orders and the children of the poor-schools of the town could join their prayers to his."

Catholic Ireland often had recourse to the Curé of Ars. The Abbess of a monastery wrote :—

“ Cher et très révééré Père,

“ The fame of the marvels wrought at Ars and the numerous graces accorded to your holy prayers has long since reached us poor Irish Catholics, so persecuted, yet so faithful and devout. You will not be surprised, then, that one of these Catholics, full of confidence in the power it has pleased the dear Master to give you with Him, should ask for a share in your goodness and prayers to obtain the cure of her sister who has been ill for a long time. She is a religious of another Order. I should wish to see her re-established in health, to the end that she may add yet new merits to those which long years in the cloister have already procured for her. Therefore, dear and very reverend Father, yield to my entreaties, and give my poor sister one of those prayers that are so efficacious and which have cured so many others.

“ I ought to ask pardon for daring to write to you, having no other recommendation than my confidence in your holy prayers. But I know you to be too much filled with the spirit of our good and gentle Master to take it amiss . . . ”

The Superior of a convent in Dublin wrote to the missionary at Ars :—

“ Our doctor, having heard of your holy Curé, has just asked us to be his intercessors with him. For years he has suffered from neuralgia, which often hinders his work and has its effect on his disposition. His wife is a Protestant, or rather she has no religion at all, which is a source of great sorrow to him. Have the kindness to speak to your good Curé on their behalf, so that our Lord may manifest His divine will by his means.

“ A family in our neighbourhood also asks a novena of prayers in the interests of one of their members, who is dissipating his patrimony in useless and ruinous expenses. He is the father of the family, unhappily Catholic only in name, and who, by his conduct, is bringing discredit on that glorious name.”

A young man wrote from Carl Street, under date 12th August, 1856 :—

“ The son of a widow, I suffer from a nervous complaint and constitutional weakness that prevents me from working. I beg you, Father, to ask God to deliver me from these ills, to pardon my sins and to bless my mother, brothers and sister here and hereafter, for the love of Jesus Christ.”

From a remote part of Ireland came the following :—

“ Très saint et très révérend Père,

“ Having received the much-wished-for reply to my letter, I hasten to send you my little offering. Would that it were larger ! for I cannot express the joy I feel in the thought that the prayers of a man so loved by the good God are to be joined to my own

for the cure of my beloved sister. I have the utmost confidence that they will be heard."

Here is a letter from Manchester :—

" Respectfully do I take the liberty of asking your intercession with the holy Mother of God on behalf of William C., of this town, who is at the moment very dangerously ill.

" We have prayed much for his cure ; and have every confidence that if you deign to add a single suppliant sigh to those of his friends, the Mother and Comforter of the afflicted will not fail to cast a look of compassion on him."

From the interior of Prussia, M. Vianney received a letter, of which the following is a translation :—

" Très digne et très vénéré Pasteur,

" *Ask and you shall receive ; knock and it shall be opened to you ; seek and you shall find . . . Go into all the world . . . Heal the sick, strengthen the weak-hearted . . . If you have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, you shall move mountains.* In addressing herself to you a poor mother of three children of tender years recalls these words, and asks that her tears may induce you to interest yourself in her. I am entirely unknown to you, and separated by a distance of two or three hundred leagues ; but I am none the less a child of the good God . . . For four years I have been between life and death. Words fail me to describe how I have suffered . . . My voice is almost spent in crying to heaven : *My God, your will, not mine ! If it be possible, let this chalice pass from me !* We know well that at Ars there lives a man raised up by God for the succour of his brethren. In reading of the wonders that take place there I was so moved that I said to myself : If I can only approach the servant of God I shall be cured ! . . . O you that are animated with the spirit of God and no longer live our life, but the life of our Lord, to you I commend myself humbly and confidently. Pray Him whom you have the privilege of seeing and holding in your hands every day to cure me. May He say to me, as he did to the woman in the Gospel who wished but to touch the hem of His garment : *Rise, your faith has saved you !*

" In my affliction and doubt I asked the advice of my Rector ; he approved of the confidence I have in you, and encouraged me to persevere in it."

Her husband added :—

" I unite with my children in commending my dear wife to you. She has very much to bear, but her patience is admirable. With what joy shall we address a letter of thanks to you when you have cured her ! Praised be Jesus Christ ! May the Lord, the God of Peace, bless us ; and may the grace of our Lord remain with us always !

CLEMENT HAIZMAN.
JANE SCHNEIDER."

Every description of case found its way to the tribunal of the Curé of Ars. Here he is asked to entreat God in the Holy Sacrifice that light may be vouchsafed to the government in an undertaking that concerns the prosperity and future of an entire country. There appeal is made to his compassion for private misfortunes, for the sorrows of a family, for domestic troubles.

Once again does the Canaanite woman of our own day intercede for her daughter; once more does the widow of Naim ask the restoration of her son. Now it is the modern centurion whose servant is sick; then it is the woman of Samaria who would learn the gift of God . . .

"I have read in the Holy Books" (says one) "that those who have faith can work miracles; the ardour of yours, Monsieur le Curé, is worthy of this gift. I approach you with clasped hands, that you may help us and ask the cure of my poor husband of Him who has said: *Ask and you shall receive!* . . ."

"Father, my mother is very ill! I beg your holy prayers for the re-establishment of a health so precious to us!

"Already has your charity accorded me your good prayers on my marriage, which took place in circumstances of cruel disquietude. Pray once again, I conjure you! May the new name I have assumed be blessed by you . . .!"

"I have in my family a poor young man of twenty, an angel of sweetness, devotion and virtue, who is dying of exhaustion supervening on premature work. His lungs are affected by that malady for which science has found no remedy as yet. Only God can preserve him to his desolate family. His own prayers are incessant and fervent. I come then to you, Monsieur le Curé, to beg you to add yours, so acceptable in the sight of God."

"Three months ago I had two children. Now I have only one, and that one is so ill that he has been given up. God has inspired me to have recourse to your prayers . . . Father! have pity on me! . . ."

"... You see, Father, that I have left nothing undone. Perhaps you would put me to the test? . . . Well then! I am resolved to persevere until I obtain what I have asked of you. Yes, I am convinced that St. Philomena will grant my cure; I am equally convinced that you can obtain it for me: that is the reason I am persisting."

"Despaired of by her doctor, who is unable to diagnose her unusual malady, an excellent young girl of seventeen is now dying, without any possibility of arresting the progress of the disease. It is impossible to describe the condition of this little martyr. Lazarus rising from his tomb was not very different. Crises succeed one another; often her last hour seems at hand. Our only hope is in prayers more holy than our own. A miracle might perhaps restore this angel of goodness and charity to us . . ."

“God has sent us a great trial. Since my husband returned from the Crimea, two years back, his health has grown steadily worse. Remedies are of no avail. In my state of profound anxiety my only hope is in God. I submit myself to His most holy will ; I wish for nothing but what He wishes, as He wishes . . . but His goodness is boundless ; and I implore Him with all the fervour of my heart to preserve my dearest husband to his four little children.

“I have thought of asking your prayers, which are so much more powerful than my own . . . If the Lord will remove this heavy cross from me may He be for ever blessed ! If He strike may His mercy not abandon us, and spare us in eternity !”

“I have recently lost my father ; and am profoundly afflicted by this latest misfortune. I need counsel and the word that really comes from God, so that I may know His will, and what it is I ought to do.

“So many persons have returned from their pilgrimage armed with supernatural strength to support the trials of this sorrowful existence, and with light by which to conduct themselves more surely, that I would have the same consolations myself at this time, when I have so much need of the help of God !”

“Odessa, 13th (25th) October, 1852.

“Monsieur le Curé,

“Very many misfortunes preoccupy and grieve me ; a single idea consoles me—the mercy of our common Master . . . Implore this mercy, Monsieur le Curé ; pray, pray for my poor sister : she it is who is the cause of all my disquietude. Married in Russia, to a man of the national religion, she has hitherto done her best to prevent her children being brought up in the Greek Church, as the law of the country prescribes. All was going well ; her eldest daughter is a fervent Catholic ; the second, who is fourteen, has already made her First Communion and promises to be a pious child like her sister. But there are three more younger ones—the smallest being no more than nine—and my poor sister is at this moment at Nice, sick. Pray for her, Monsieur le Curé. She suffers, but, as she says herself, more in mind than in body. If the Lord call her to Himself, what is to become of her children ?”

“Wortheim, Westphalia, 6th March.

“Monsieur le Curé,

“I have not the honour of knowing you, but my sister, Mathilde de R., had the privilege of seeing you in May, 1856, and has often spoken of you to me. Besides, I know that it is sufficient that one is in trouble and needs help to ensure a good reception by the Curé of Ars.

“A multitude of difficulties and pains both interior and exterior assail me. At the head of a family of nine, I am expect-

ing my confinement some months hence; and the prospect saddens and disquiets me more than usual. The cares consequent on such a numerous family and other anxieties are thus united to a sadness of soul and a presentiment of trouble which I am unable to explain. God alone can help me. Will you, Monsieur le Curé, obtain for me the graces and assistance of which I stand so much in need by joining in a novena in honour of St. Joseph, which should commence on the eleventh of this month?

"I address myself in a special manner to this great Saint, the protector of Christian families, in the hope that he will take special care of ours and help us supernaturally. I desire to pray to him through the Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary, in the name of St. Teresa and St. Philomena.

"May I venture to hope, Monsieur le Curé, that you will pray with us? I entreat you in the names of Jesus and Mary, and ask your blessing on me and mine from the depths of my heart."

Again, it is the Generals of Orders, Superiors of Communities, Mothers of the Visitation, Daughters of St. Clare, St. Ursula and St. Teresa, who consult him in the interests of their congregation, who fly to him in their doubts and do nothing without his advice. "I have such confidence in the prayers of the holy Curé," said one of them, "that the mere assurance that he would speak to our Lord concerning my troubles lightened the burden of them."

Now it is the Abbot of a monastery who declares that he has derived an indelible consolation from the reassuring words that the man of God had deigned to address to him. "I was utterly unworthy," added he, "and almost repented of my temerity in having dared to write to this holy priest."

Or it is the heir to a great name who asks whether he ought to abandon his ideas of religious life and remain in the world and marry. It is evident from this letter that the young gentleman had been converted at Ars, and afterwards, on the advice of the holy Curé, made a retreat under the guidance of the Jesuit Fathers.

Then we hear of three old men, respectable enough otherwise and much esteemed in their own part, but who refuse the succours of religion. Their family are in the last stage of anxiety at the thought of their approaching death and commend them with entreaty to the prayers of the servant of God.

Once more we find the Superioress of a Benedictine convent writing on behalf of her community: "Transported eleven years since into the mountains of Quercy," says she, "we have vast expenses to meet and despite our economies we have been unable, so far, to complete our enclosure. We have the greatest desire to do this and pray to all the saints in the calendar for it. If you are kind enough to interest yourself in the poor daughters of

St. Benedict you will surely obtain from our holy Mother all that we desire." . . . The recommendations that follow these lines and which ask the cure of four or five sick show the greatest faith in the all-powerful efficacy of the prayers of the Curé of Ars, as if to ask a miracle and obtain it were the same thing for him.

Anon it is Presidents of the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul who beseech M. Vianney to give them the benefit of his counsels for the carrying out of their work, so that it may conform as closely as possible to the will of God.

The case of a young non-commissioned officer about to appear before a court-martial is committed to M. Vianney.

Next it is an unfortunate victim of worldliness, a young woman corrupted by reading; she would return to God, but the most violent passions impede her entry on the narrow road. She inclines to virtue, desirous of knowing yet not daring to approach it. "O you who are the friend of God," says she, "and one whom He hears favourably, pray for me, that my wandering thoughts may be fixed on Him . . . The world calls and smiles upon me . . . I am still young; they tell me I am clever. False friends have applauded my first literary efforts and suggest that I should write more . . . May God have pity on me, Father! If this struggle continues I shall lose my reason . . . I had the idea of going to Ars to tell you of my life—it is a lamentable story!—to ask your advice, to hear what your priestly experience would suggest . . . In the name of God, Father, bid me come! . . . and I will be at your feet, receiving your holy instructions."

An unhappy woman, elderly, infirm, destitute of resources, almost abandoned, broken by trials without number, afflicted—in body by pain and in soul by terrible temptations and weariness—conjures the Curé of Ars to extend to her the same charity that has been of such benefit to so many others. She "seeks help in nothing else but prayer, and would recover her health at the hand of God alone." Should it please our Lord to withdraw her from such a distressing situation by the agency of His great servant, she promises M. Vianney, "not empty gratitude, of which his perfect self-abnegation has no need, but the most ardent zeal in devoting the faculties thus restored to her to the glory of God."

A literary man, editor-in-chief of a provincial journal, his life has been nothing but a tale of misfortunes. He has debts which he wishes to discharge—the idea of dying insolvent is insupportable. Old age is advancing rapidly upon him, with its consequent infirmities. He dreads making another mistake, for, up to the present all his undertakings have miscarried. He acknowledges that he has deserved all these trials and greater still; also that God in chastising him, has really exercised a work of mercy on him. Since the eyes of his soul have been opened to the admir-

able truths of faith he has not ceased to ask that he may know the holy will of God ; and the words : *Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do ?* are his prayer at every moment. Darkness still perseveres and with it tribulations. He has said to himself : “ I am unworthy to obtain the favour I ask of the good God ; but if a Saint were to ask it would be given me.” Filled with this hope, he addresses himself to the venerable Curé of Ars. What the latter counsels that he will do. He will accept the lot that may be assigned to him as from the hand of God ; nothing will be too humiliating for him ; he only wishes to be assured that he is doing right.

The Superioress of an Augustinian convent asks from the remote side of Germany the cure of one of her dear daughters in Jesus Christ which she has very much at heart—submitting to the good pleasure of God the while.

A priest who directs an institution in the south of France writes on 20th March, 1854 :—

“ A woman who has experienced severe trials for some months has had recourse to me. She is nervous and melancholic in a very high degree. It seems likely that the devil will take advantage of the physical disorders that are undermining her constitution to excite in her that species of exaltation the outcome of which is monomania or suicide . . . The lady has always been pious ; she has a son who promises to be a good priest. In the names of mother and son I appeal to you, most venerable colleague, to obtain the cure of this poor widow, so well deserving of God’s compassion and your own.

“ It seems to me that were you to write a line or two to assure her that you will be so kind as to pray for her intention and inspire her with confidence that her trials will not be beyond her strength ; you would do very great good.”

Another director of an institution thus naïvely addresses the Curé of Ars :—

“ I have a favour to ask ; your inexhaustible charity will not refuse it ! It is that you promise me to ask of the good God that when you shall be in paradise He will place me beside you, together with my brother, sister, nieces, all my relations and scholars ; that you will ask this now in advance ; and that in the meantime the efficacious grace of salvation may be granted us.”

A young man of eighteen writes from London to ask the holy Curé to beg of God that if it be His will a moral trouble which causes much suffering may cease “ . . . it may be that this trial is good for me,” adds the pious young man, “ but perhaps also our good God, who is rich in mercy, would permit me to encompass the same good by different means ; that is to say, give me the benefit gratuitously in return for my prayers.”

A poor convict writes from the Camp of Sidi-Brahim, 28th December, 1854 :—

“ Monsieur le Curé,

“ My sister tells me how happy she has been in spending eight days with you. She has made a vow at the feet of St. Philomena that if I recover my liberty she will take me to Ars to thank her. May I ask your intercession with your venerated Saint, promising her that if I am set at liberty I will—before seeing my sister—present myself to return thanks to the glorious martyr and ask your own blessing? If I am so fortunate as to receive a line from you my troubles will be much lightened and I shall find greater courage to support them in the idea that you also, Monsieur, think of the poor prisoner.”

More than all was M. Vianney entreated to obtain relief for souls in distress, and sinners without end were recommended to him. A letter reached him from Dublin :—

“ Mon très-révérend Père,

“ I take the liberty of recourse to your holy prayers. The Protestant father of four children by his Catholic wife has formally declared his intention of educating these children—hitherto brought up in the practice of our holy and sublime religion—in heresy. The poor mother continues to instil into the hearts of these children sentiments of faith and love for our holy observances, waiting until such time as it may please the infinite charity of our beloved Saviour to enlighten and change the heart of her husband.

“ Knowing full well how pleasing your prayers are to God, and what power they have with the Heart of our Lord and His most holy Mother, I have confidence that they will obtain for us this grace so much to be desired.”

From her convent in Auvergne a good religious asks of him the conversion of her father :—

“ Monsieur le Curé,

“ I have long thought of addressing myself to you, but with the desperation of one to whom every means seems ineffectual ; now, however, encouraged by obedience I confide my sorrows to you and implore your charity. Ever since I have been able to understand the matter I have never ceased to weep and pray over the errors of a father whom indeed I hardly know, but for whom I have the deepest affection. To tell you of his life would be too painful ; it will suffice to excite your compassion and zeal to say that, separated from his family since the date of my birth and divorced from all religious principles, there seems no ground for hope of his return. He is now fifty-nine, and has not made his First Communion. Think, then, of the state of that soul! Ah!

no doubt everything is possible with God. The greatest miseries draw down His greatest mercies; nobody should know that better than I perhaps, and yet such is the poignancy of my sorrow that hope seems to abandon me.

"Will you then interest yourself in that soul? I should be glad to know whether you think that the good God may not be asking something that I can give Him, in order that He may grant me the salvation of my unhappy father. Any ray of hope that you could give me would sweeten my own bitterness."

The Superioress of a convent in Brittany writes to the missionary at Ars:—

"Will you be kind enough to commend to the prayers of your venerable Curé a young person in our community who for some months past has been the object of violent temptations? She is a model of all virtue: gentle, obedient, simple, above all humble; and it is on this last point that the devil attacks her most severely. Not being able to induce her to commit sin, he avails himself of her humility to throw her into a state of discouragement. She sees nothing in herself but infidelity to grace; she believes she has lost her vocation and, finding nothing but excessive desolation and weariness, she imagines she can only recover the peace of mind she formerly enjoyed by returning to the world. You see how worthy of compassion is this soul! And so it is with the greatest urgency that we ask you to let us know what may be the holy Curé's advice in the matter."

From a village in Dauphiné:—

"Monsieur,

"Some days ago I sent a young person to Ars who aspires to the religious state, under the pious guidance of the good Sisters of the Five Wounds. This child, long enamoured of the illusions of life, found that the world would not suffice for the needs of her heart . . . Souls destined for infinite love very quickly perceive the end of all human joys and affections . . . A skilful director understood her, put reality into her life, gave a name and shape to her dreams, and pointed out the only way that would lead to happiness. But the hour of trials came. It did not even wait until the prodigal had returned to God. The birth of this soul to the life divine did but multiply them.

"Behold her then arrived at that difficult period at which detachment becomes more difficult still because the good Master, after having asked everything else, now demands that sacrifice of *self* which is so hard to give up. With a nature easily allured, a faith as yet feeble, and a love still imperfect, she struggles painfully against the storm, and her little bark is always ready to overturn

"On the other hand, while the salvation of this young girl is exposed to danger in the world her health presents an obstacle to her entry into religion. Nevertheless, seeing the perpetual oscillations of her soul, I was inclined to cast her into the arms of our Lord at any risk, i.e., to send her as a postulant as soon as possible. Sometimes it pays to tempt God, and a headlong generosity will succeed when it is exercised in the interests of heaven. But the poor child has been to Ars, and the holy Curé has strongly discouraged her entry into a convent until such time as her health be restored. What is to be done? I am quite undecided and most anxious. Almighty God has been pleased to give me a sort of maternal mission in regard to the child. At the same time I am satisfied that He has no need of anyone to carry out His work; He has chosen me out of pure mercy . . . But the gifts of God have to be purchased, and I have experienced very keen distress in the matter. I am fearful lest, if I should endeavour to save her through the cloister after what the Curé of Ars has said I should live to repent it. Once more, what is to be done? Which course am I to take? I need prayers and counsel; and write to implore both from your thaumaturge.

"Then kindly ask this man of God, this prophet, why he has so strongly urged this child to recover her health before entering a convent. Can it be that he has some prevision concerning her? I fear so . . . If you can obtain any light for me on the subject I shall be grateful to you."

The Curé of Ars was frequently asked for counsel and direction. A young girl wrote from Paris:—

"Like so many others, I have recourse to you . . . I have heard of you and your miracles . . . If God wishes me to know His will by the voice of the Curé of Ars, I said to myself, it will be quicker than obtaining the same grace by means of long prayers! Age notwithstanding, I think I am still but a child; but our Lord never repulsed children; only I am far from having the simplicity that made them so acceptable to the good Jesus. I am sixteen years of age; I have never thought seriously about my vocation, but I want to save my soul . . .

"Since God has given you the gift of penetration of hearts, you see what is happening in my soul. I ought to tell you that I have often spoken very thoughtlessly about yourself, though without having ceased to have a secret respect for you. But it was merely in fun . . .

"My mother wishes me to ask your advice concerning the vocation of my eldest brother, who is twenty-eight . . . Then, good Father, enlighten the family and give us your benediction from afar."

The daughter of an officer of rank wrote to the Curé from Lunéville:—

“ Monsieur le Curé,

“ Knowing your charity and the graces God has given you, I write to describe the state of my soul in a few words. I am sixteen years old, and for some time I have had the desire of becoming a religious. Up to now I had thought of entering the same house in which my early days were passed ; but a nun in whom I have confidence thinks that an active life would be more suited to one of my character. I know not whither to betake myself. My strongest attraction is for the Visitation. I am also drawn towards the Carmelites, because they are a severe Order, and with them I should be able to expiate the faults of which my impulsive nature has caused me to be guilty. More than all should I wish for a house where Communion is frequent, for that is my great happiness. I am undecided and need enlightenment. Besides, there are many obstacles to my vocation. My mother is very pious ; but Papa is a soldier, and I am quite sure it would be very difficult to obtain his consent.

“ Pardon me for thus writing to you, M. le Curé, about my poor little self. But God will reward you for anything you do for me.”

The certainty that M. Vianney could read hearts like an open book and that he had the gift of interior penetration inspired some to venture on confidences and unburdenings of soul still more intimate. Thus one from Paris :—

“ They say, Father, that you read the conscience. Ah ! look at mine, and help me to discover the secret evils that rob me of my peace of mind. Outwardly I fulfil all my duties ; I am treated with a consideration that I do not deserve in the least. But a very marked uneasiness has disillusioned me of it all. I condemn life and I fear death. It seems to me that something within me presents an obstacle to the grace of God, and I am unable to find out what it is. Often I think it is a subtle pride ; again I think it is some sin that I am hiding even from myself. O you from whom hearts have no secrets ! do not hesitate to lay open my disease and all its dangers . . . I will do all that you advise.

“ Sometimes I think myself ill-used. Am I not rather a proud sinner who cannot bring herself to forgive as she hopes to be forgiven ? I trust, Father, that despite the inevitable vagueness of a letter, your charity will see me clearer than I can see myself and that you will write me one of those God-given words that enlighten and make a lasting impression.”

M. Vianney received from Paris a letter from a recent convert, written on the eve of a general Communion at Notre Dame :—

“ Vénérable Père en Notre-Seigneur Jésus-Christ,

“ A great sinner comes to throw himself at your feet and ask your powerful prayers for the pardon of his iniquities . . . The prodigal would return to his Father ; but he is so weak, so

wretched, so covered with sins, that he has great need of the prayers of the just, so that it may be permitted him to hope that God will receive him at His Table and welcome him on Sunday.

"Pray, venerable Father, that having received the grace of reconciliation I may also receive light to show me the path in which I should walk and the strength to enter upon it courageously, wherever it may be . . . It seems to me that I am disposed to do all that God requires of me now that I have received absolution from my sins. May your own immense faith obtain for me the clear-sightedness I seek !

"I kiss your evangelical hand with feelings of the deepest respect and the most filial affection."

A member of the Bonaparte family—a descendant of Lucien on the mother's side—wrote a letter to M. Vianney, the introduction of which was so profusely bestrewn with flowers of speech that it was not even read :—

"The signal favours with which it has pleased our Lord to load one of the dearest of His servants, whose edifying life is a silent sermon and a perpetual miracle, have impelled me to have recourse to you, to the end that by your prayers and remembrance of me in the holy and adorable Sacrifice of the altar you will not forget him who in writing to you has the distinguished privilege of being in communion of thought with one of the glories of the Church of France, the holy priest who without any possible doubt reproduces in the nineteenth century the radiant virtues of St. Vincent de Paul and of Pierre Fourier, by his ardent love of God and his inexhaustible zeal for the salvation of souls.

"I know these compliments, or more correctly the simple homage to truth, may appear distressing to your profound humility, but it is hardly necessary for me to say that you will place these eulogies to the honour of the divine Master who has chosen you to be a light in Israel as well as a helper of your suffering brethren . . ."

(The foregoing fragment was snatched from the burning to which its pompous preamble had condemned it—a fate that had overtaken many of its predecessors).

We have found an autograph of the Vicomte Edward Walsh, which—knowing how well he stands in the sight of the God whom he has glorified by writings that are so well known to all Catholics—we reproduce here :—

"Monsieur et Vénérable Curé,

"Excuse the great liberty I take in addressing myself directly to you, well knowing how precious and usefully employed is your time. But it is a question of saving a soul which Satan would wrest from our Lord, of restoring the honour and peace of one of our best families. It is for this reason that, all unworthy as I am, I come with confidence to ask of your immense charity a very

special intention before God and the Most Blessed Virgin, on behalf of a great sinner, but a sincere penitent . . . ”

The voice of the Episcopate was by no means wanting in the concert. Princes of the Church wrote to the Curé of Ars to claim a share in his prayers and sacrifices ; some even to consult him on delicate points of administration. Thus we find letters from the Archbishops or Bishops of Lyons, Aix, Orleans, Dijon, Annecy, Grenoble, Autun, Valence, Evreux, Gap, Châlons-sur-Marne, etc.

From the diocese of Nîmes, during the illness of Mgr. Cart, came the following :—

“ Our holy Bishop has for a long time been the victim of a malady which the doctors declare to be incurable. The disease makes fresh progress day by day, and the diocese is in prayer to ask of God the recovery of the venerable prelate.

“ I would therefore, Monsieur le Curé, entreat you to make a novena for this intention. I have every hope that the good God will listen to your prayers and that for the good of the Church of Nîmes, He will preserve a life so precious to it.”

A member of the higher clergy of Belgium wrote in the month of October, 1856 :—

“ Monsieur le Curé,

“ Very often have I thought of having recourse to you, to ask in the name of charity, which knows no limitations of distance, for a small place in your pious mementoes before God. To-day, however, I feel so powerfully impelled to do so that I can no longer refrain. Here is the principal reason for my confidence in addressing you. If we may attach any credence to special communications that our Lord deigns to make to certain humble, simple, obedient souls, of great purity of heart, it should be pleasing to the celestial Father that priests, animated by a truly sacerdotal spirit, prudently endeavour by prayer, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, their sermons and their example, to renew the spirit of Jesus Christ in the clergy of our Belgium.

“ Perhaps, Monsieur le Curé, I am very indiscreet. If so, your charity will pardon me. If, on the contrary, the good God deign to receive this communication favourably, you will, I trust, commend its object to our Lord—not forgetting His ministers who have such need of His lights and of His mercies.”

The Superior General of a Society of Missionaries who has several establishments in France and the United States wrote to him at a time when he had to decide on the continuance of these widely-separated houses :—

“ Please, Monsieur et vénérable confrère, lay this special intention at the feet of our Lord ; and if in His mercy He deign to

communicate any light on the subject to you, transmit it to me. It concerns the interests of a great number of souls."

The ardent and zealous founder of the Society of the Most Holy Sacrament wrote to him :—

"I am able to rejoice your piety towards our Lord in the Blessed Eucharist, by announcing the realisation of the idea of which Père Hermann spoke to you, which you have blessed and for which you have prayed. The Society of the Most Holy Sacrament was founded in Paris four months since. Its object is to cause our Lord to be known, served and adored in the Sacrament of His love by every heart . . . It is Mary who has given one of her poor children to Jesus . . . It is I, good and venerated Father, who had the honour of receiving you into the Third Order of Mary two years ago. . . I beg you then, for the love of our good Master, to continue your prayers for a blessing on this little grain of mustard-seed."

Nowhere was any important work established without recourse to his advice and prayers. From the diocese of Rennes, for example :—

"Some time ago I addressed myself to the venerable Curé of Ars, to bespeak his advice and prayers touching the excellent work that His Eminence Cardinal Gousset desires to found. He has directed me to re-establish and supervise an ancient pilgrimage in which there would be much good to be done by preaching and giving retreats. But—as at the commencement of every good work—many difficulties arose; we have need of prayers, counsel, special support in the acquisition of a house, knowledge of a suitable person for the work, for moral and material organisation.

"I place all my confidence in God, in Mary Immaculate, and St. Philomena, to whom I have a great devotion; but if M. le Curé would be so good as to recall all the questions I have put to him and would reply through you I should be infinitely grateful."

A curé in the North of France conjures M. Vianney to obtain by his all-powerful intercession the regeneration of his parish :—

"Deign to pray every day that our Lord, the Great Physician, may heal the wounds of my people, convert this little Niniveh and prepare here a people acceptable to Himself. Please pray often, and very often, that the curé himself may receive the Holy Ghost with all His gifts and become a saint capable of forming other saints in his turn."

Another asks his advice :—

"For a long time I have had to deal with a woman who believes she has revelations—regarded by some as genuine, dismissed by others as imaginary. She believes she has seen Jesus

Christ many and many a time, showing her His Heart mangled and torn ; that of His holy Mother pierced with eight swords—of which seven signify the capital sins, the eighth sacrileges calling for reparatory suffering. Since 1851 our Lord has declared to her that France had been chastised and would be more and more so until the institution of such reparation. ‘ I will speak by deeds, prodigies and miracles,’ said our Lord to her, in 1843.

“ I fear lest this lady, who is otherwise a good Christian, may be under a delusion. Deign then to pray to God to make known the truth as to the origin of the revelations and demands that this person believes to have been communicated to her by the divine Master.”

The Curé of Chelles, in the diocese of Meaux, wrote :—

“ Monsieur et vénérable Curé,

“ To-day all the world knows and venerates your name. It is indeed fortunate that in these evil times heaven has placed a man of God on earth to re-kindle in all hearts the sacred fire that is not entirely extinct. During the last pastoral retreat the Archbishop of Aix related things concerning Ars and its Curé which prove that they alone do good and hinder evil who do not seek the applause of the world. Also that this world—perverse though it be—becomes an echo of God by rendering homage to virtue wherever it may be found.

“ Allow a poor priest entirely unknown to you to ask your co-operation if possible, your prayers at least, on behalf of an undertaking that I trust God will bless through you. Speculators have recently purchased the remains of our ancient royal abbey of Chelles, so famous in old France. Some plots have already been sold, but the buildings have not been pulled down as yet. I am just now trying to buy them back again in order to turn them into a hospital, of which we stand much in need.

“ Your name has suggested itself to me more than once ; and now I feel more than ever impelled to lay this project before you—in the hope that you will recommend it to the crowd of Catholics who come to consult you, and of whom the greater number are willing to do good. I make no doubt but that God will commission you to come to my assistance.”

The Curé of Ars received several letters from Mgr. de Ségur, one of which we reproduce :—

“ Mon cher Père,

“ Please continue to help me by your prayers, and also think kindly of my soul, for which our Lord suffered. I am sending one of my Parisian friends to you. He will ask your assistance, and I commend him to your charity.

“ Did I not know that you love the good God with all your heart already I should wish you this happiness, the only happi-

ness worthy of the name. Please obtain it for me, for, in spite of my good will, I have nothing more than a tiny ray of that immense light as yet.

"I am at your service in our Lord. If the good Master has told you anything concerning me, be so charitable as to tell my friend, who will convey it to me.

L. G. DE SÉGUR,
Prelate of the Papal Household,
Canon of St. Denis."

Not to prolong these citations unduly, we will conclude with a few letters, the accent of piety and simplicity of which has specially impressed us :—

"My good and excellent Father,

"It is with a full heart that I approach you, although I should have wished to do so otherwise than by letter. Several of my friends are now making the pilgrimage to Ars. Up to the last moment I had hoped to be of their number, but God has not deemed me worthy of such a happiness.

"I come then to ask of you the conversion of my father, mother and husband. The task is a most difficult one. Of myself I can effect nothing ; but God will do much at your intercession.

"Father, I have three children ; offer them to the Immaculate Virgin on my behalf. To her I cede my rights in them. May they be even the least among her servants ! May I never be tempted to take back what I have offered long since ; so that they may be entirely at her service and that of her divine Son ! . . . "

"Mon très honoré Père,

"I am a poor little creature who comes to ask you for the sake of the love that Jesus, Mary, Joseph and St. Philomena bear you to obtain for me by your prayers so great a purity of heart, mind, body and intention that, never losing sight of Jesus, I may live in union with Him by a great desire to please Him. Yet again I ask you to pray that by the remembrance of my sins and by gratitude for the graces I have received from God I may conceive a feeling of shame and contempt for myself which may ever purify me more and more and detach me from creatures ; so that the good God occupying my whole being, the world may henceforth be as nothing to me.

"I commend to your charitable prayers the conversion of my brothers and the First Communion of my nephew. May the good Master take possession of his little heart in that happy moment and for always !"

"Monsieur le Curé,

"A poor child who has much need of grace comes to commend herself to your good prayers. She has a much-loved father whose conversion at Easter she ardently desires, and some brothers who

no longer love the good God, since they have given up the duties of a Christian life. One of them is on the point of exposing his salvation to great risk by embarking on a very sorry career and a very dangerous one for a child of Holy Church. Ah! ask of the good God that He will take this poor brother in His arms and to His Heart, so that he may never more depart from Him! . . . But I would place both of them in the same dear and sweet sanctuary! I conjure you, good Monsieur le Curé, to offer these three hearts I love to the Saviour Jesus, through His most holy Mother. Your prayer is so powerful with the divine mercy! He will hear you and we shall all be happy."

When the feast of St. John the Baptist arrived addresses poured in from every quarter, full of expressions of the most lively gratitude. We will only quote one of them—from a person well-known and highly honoured in the world:—

" Mon vénérable Père,

" The sweet bonds of gratitude that will ever attach me to you make it a heartfelt duty to offer you my good wishes on St. John the Baptist's day. The lines I address to his adopted son will be agreeable to the Precursor of the good Jesus; and you must receive them, Father, as a token of profound and affectionate respect.

" I have submitted myself to the Lord's will; but if it should please the good Master to cure me on the festival of His Precursor, your daughter will be very happy. Obtain that, Father; you have already embarked on this great work; you that have done so much for my soul and my family! . . . I am asking myself how to acquit myself of my obligations to you . . . I will pray our beloved Jesus to repay you . . .

" Are you satisfied with me? I am doing very little for heaven. Oh! if I were near you it would be far otherwise! . . . Far distant from you, I nevertheless try to be gentle, humble and penitent. This is not always easy. May God help me to resist the temptations of the devil!

" One of the greatest joys of my cure will be in going to see you. Then you will tell me all I ought to do for God and His glory. You will tell me my faults quite plainly. And you will find me a submissive child on earth, as I hope to attend on you in heaven.

" You must not forget my husband, son and daughter on the occasion of your feast. Please, Father, accept their good wishes with your habitual kindness.

" Pray that the Lord may help us in the moral resurrection of this unhappy country. It seems to me that my family have succeeded better since I have commended them to your prayers."

Sometimes letters arriving from more distant localities insisted on receiving an answer, as though even the briefest correspondence was not a matter entirely incompatible with a round of labour that commenced at one o'clock in the morning and continued without the least intermission till eight or nine at night—leaving only to this martyr of charity and zeal the time for a little recollection before God, his usual reading in the Lives of the Saints, and to take a little rest and food! But, unless one had been actually on the spot and able to observe the habits of the Curé of Ars closely it were difficult to form even a vague idea of an existence so extraordinary.

CHAPTER XXX

SOME OF THE CURES OBTAINED AT ARS

Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall be free . . . (Is. xxxv., 5-6.)

Often, through the greatness of his merits, the powers of disease have been broken, and the sick body has been raised up and restored to health. (Roman Brev., Hymn Conf.)

HOLY Church has ever avowed her belief in miracles and commended them to the respect and admiration of her children as a proof of her union with Him who is marvellous in His saints and has promised to be with her to the end of the world. "Christ, in ascending into heaven has enriched mankind by His benefits ; but He shows Himself lavish to all who call upon Him and more especially towards those of His elect who approach Him with simplicity and seek Him with all the ardour of their hearts, for He is bounteous in mercy. In this manner He would at one and the same time give glory to those who have applied themselves unreservedly to the advancement of His own glory and, through them, manifest His Church adorned with every gift and heavenly grace, like a queen resplendent with jewels, so that by presenting herself to men with ever-increasing radiance she may easily be recognised by all." (Bull of Clement XIV. at the canonization of St. Joseph of Cupertino).

Miracles are one of the simplest and most essential conditions of the sovereignty of God over the world. They are the natural sequence of innocence restored in virtue of sacrifice made. Masters of spiritual science are unanimous in recognising that this empire of the saints, which goes even to the extent of suspending the ordinary course of the laws of creation, is to be explained by that state of primitive justice which these heroes of purity and penance have recovered and which places them in the same state as Adam and Eve were originally in their terrestrial paradise. Man, in becoming complete master of himself, becomes master of nature once more. "Is it a matter for astonishment," wrote the Venerable Bede, "that one who loyally and faithfully obeys the Creator and Lord of all things should find that creatures obey him in turn?"

We are well aware that it is very easy for the ignorant to shrug their shoulders at the mention of the word "miracle." But what does that prove in face of the almighty power of God and against the recorded facts of history? Is God able to work miracles and can He, as He has promised, vouchsafe the gift of miracles to whomsoever He pleases? This question needs no

answer for anyone who really believes in the existence of God. And as to the reality of a miracle, that is a fact which is established, like all other external facts, by evidence.

This chapter, then, will be nothing more than a long hearing of witnesses, during which we shall have nothing to say, but remain content to do no more than listen.

First of all we will hear Catherine Lassagne, as the oldest and best-informed of all. "M. le Curé," wrote this simple and worthy woman, in 1830, "conceals as much as possible the graces of healing he obtains; but he obtains plenty of them . . . I think he would rather cure souls." Catherine made no mistake, for M. Vianney often exclaimed in his naïve fashion: "I have asked St. Philomena not to concern herself so much with bodies, but think rather about souls which are in so much greater need of healing."

One of the directresses of the *Providence* was dying of a malignant fever accompanied by delirium. The doctors had abandoned all hope. She could neither see nor hear; and one would have thought she could not have lived the day through. It was on a Saturday. When she seemed to have arrived at her very last, they recited the Recommendation of a Departing Soul, but she took no notice. Suddenly she opened her eyes saying, "I am cured!" The candle which had been lit to lighten her last moments and afterwards to watch over her corpse attracted her attention. "What's that candle for?" she asked. They told her that M. le Curé had just been to say the last prayers for her. Then she wanted to get up, which she did by the help of her companion; she remained seated for a moment without feeling in the least ill. They sent for the doctor, who found no fever remaining and could hardly believe his own eyes. He declared that it was a miracle. On the evening before M. le Curé had said: "I have almost scolded St. Philomena. I was very much tempted to reproach her with the chapel I built in her honour." By this it was understood that he had prayed for this cure, which took place in 1838.

"One of us," says Catherine, "gave a poor woman as an alms an old cap that had been discarded by M. le Curé. This poor woman put it on the head of her child with the reflection: 'The Curé of Ars is a saint. If I had faith my child would be cured.' The child suffered from a wound in the head. The same evening when the mother went to dress the sore place it had disappeared and was now dry."

One day two Protestants of note came to Ars and were ushered into the poorly-furnished apartment of the servant of God. One of them—a Calvinist minister—turned the conversation on miracles, and was by no means prepared to admit their possibility. "What!" said the holy Curé, "you deny miracles? But I

can assure you that I have seen them myself, and the most astonishing ones too." Where had he seen miracles if not at Ars? We note this avowal, which confirms what we are about to relate.

After Catherine, Madame Raymond-Corcevay, of Châlon-sur-Saône, has the right to be heard, because of the number and importance of the documents in the case, of which the following is a *résumé* :—

"The first time I saw the Curé of Ars was in May, 1843—the time at which the good Father was attacked by a malady believed to be fatal. I was allowed to enter his room; seeing which he made a motion as if to bless me. I was then suffering very much from a chronic affection of the larynx and bronchial tubes; the despair of all our doctors—a living skeleton. That blessing half cured me.

"Three days later I assisted at the three o'clock Mass by which M. le Curé celebrated his own cure and returned thanks to St. Philomena. Thrice did he come to the church and I consulted him about my condition. He said: 'My child, earthly remedies are useless to you. Already you have tried more than enough of them. But the good God will cure you . . . Address yourself to St. Philomena; lay your account at her feet. Do violence to her; tell her that if she will not restore your voice she must give you her own.'

"I followed this counsel. I hastened to cast myself at the feet of the *dear little Saint*; I united myself with all my heart to the Curé of Ars. The effect was instantaneous. For two years I had not spoken; for six years I had suffered dreadfully. On my return to the house of Madame Favier, where I was lodging, I read in a loud voice several pages from *La Confiance en la sainte Vierge* . . . I was cured.

"The next time I saw M. Vianney he said to me: 'My child, don't forget to make a thanksgiving; and be here for the feast of St. Philomena.' On 10th August I was behind the good Saint himself during Mass. At the elevation I sang in a strong and well-sustained voice, and when the Office was finished M. Vianney congratulated me on what the *little Saint* had done for me—restoring my power of song as well as that of speech. As to this last, you know, Father, how liberal I am in my use of it! Nevertheless, even the abuse of it has never brought on the continual pain from which I suffered before my cure.

"Some years later I followed the beloved Father, mixed up with the crowd that covered the face of the square and surrounded him. I told him that I was very grateful to St. Philomena for the restoration of my speech, and asked if he thought the *dear Saint* would be good enough to conserve it to me. He replied: 'O my child, use it always for the glory of God and the salvation

of souls, and fear not.' Then he added : ' Listen, while I tell you what happened a few days ago. A woman from the country had brought a little girl of seven here—dumb from birth. The good mother was making her confession in the sacristy when suddenly she stopped short. " Well, my child, continue," said I. " Oh ! Father, I cannot ! Only think of it ! Never yet have I heard my child speak ; and now—listen ! Oh ! what a grace, Father, what a grace !" And indeed the child had recovered her voice and talked quite distinctly ; she was cured ! See the power of God ! This poor woman,' added the holy Curé, ' was too much moved, too much upset to go on with her confession. She could only repeat, with tears : " What a grace, my God, what a grace !" '

" In May, 1843, an ecclesiastic from Moulins came to Ars in the last stage of consumption, to whom M. Vianney had announced that he would not be cured and that he was for heaven. In spite of this prognosis, the good priest tarried at Ars, hoping that he might yet find a happy issue out of his sufferings from the all-powerful mercy of our Lord. When the malady of the holy Curé was at its worst this priest was of the greatest assistance—redoubling his care and watching and being always the first to help. On his recovery M. Vianney said to him : ' My friend, you have been so charitable to me during my illness that the good God has changed His designs in your regard ; you will be cured. You will erect a statue of St. Philomena in one of the churches of your town asking the parish which you have chosen to build the chapel for it. So will you make your thanksgiving.' All happened as the Curé of Ars had foretold.

" I have a relation," continues Madame Raymond, " who, in consequence of the revolution, completely lost her wits for three months. Care, distraction, remedies were lavished upon her—all without result. Her poor mother being desperate and not knowing what to do brought her to me. I referred her to our beloved *Saint*. ' My dear lady,' said he, ' make a novena to St. Philomena. I will pray with you. You will see that all will come right.' All did come right, for on the last day of the novena there was no trace of the malady to be detected in my young relation. At present she is the mother of five children and at the head of an important business, which she conducts with marked ability. And never has anyone noticed the least sign of weakness about her.

" One day I with one of my friends took a great sinner to see the holy Curé. This man had lived for twenty-five years separated from God by the thick mists of unbelief. He wanted to see the Curé of Ars and get away as soon as possible. But the hour of grace had sounded for him. The very look of M. Vianney struck him as if it had been the presence of our Saviour Himself. He fell at his feet, confessed three times with floods of tears, abjured the

horrible oaths by which he was bound to the secret societies and approached the Holy Table with such lively sentiments of faith and love that he obtained at the same time the cure of his mother-in-law, who had long been helpless from rheumatism

"This wolf transformed into a lamb persevered in the most austere practices of a Christian life for two years ; after which he was attacked by purifying pains, which he bore without a single complaint : 'Thou art just, O Lord,' he repeated, during his long martyrdom, 'and Thy judgments are right !' Our beloved Father assured us that he died the death of a saint and that he was in heaven.

"Another day I conducted to Ars one of my nephews who had suffered from a cancerous affection of the gravest description for six years. M. le Curé greeted him with : 'My friend, let us cure the soul first ; then go to Lyons to be operated upon. St. Philomena will bless the operation and all will be well ; you will be cured for a certainty.' M. Barrier, surgeon to the Hôtel-Dieu, performed the operation. A fortnight after the patient, who had not even been feverish, resumed his work with the greatest energy. From that day to this he has enjoyed the most perfect health and cherishes the most grateful memory of the prophetic words of the holy Curé.

"I must not omit the cure of a young woman whom we have only lately lost and who has left the countryside in admiration of her life and regret for her decease. In a few years she had fulfilled a long career and one as Christian and edifying as it was possible to be. She leaves behind a husband worthy of her and three little angels who are his consolation. When this woman was a child she dislocated her hip and it was badly set. A cavity formed, from which for some years seven purulent abscesses discharged, with the result that the affected side was almost necrosed. The poor little martyr kept her bed and grew gradually weaker, when her mother heard of my own cure. She resolved to take the child to Ars. On the first journey the child walked with two crutches ; on the second she had only need of one ; the third time she placed that one on the altar of St. Philomena ; and up to the time of the illness that carried her off and which was the result of an accident she enjoyed the most perfect health.

"In 1857 I fell dangerously sick ; and the gravest complications speedily reduced me to the last extremity. The doctor declared that no cure was possible. They prayed for me ; they went to Ars to entreat the *good Saint* to come to my assistance once more. In pointing out on his own body the seat of the malady that afflicted me—I had acute inflammation of the liver, accompanied by dropsy and intestinal inflammation—he said : 'She is very ill. Oh ! what trouble is there !' Several times he made the same gesture and the same remark, adding : 'Pray

carnestly for her, and we will begin a novena to St. Philomena together.'

"At the conclusion of the novena I was a little better. My husband took advantage of this improvement to go to Ars himself and ask the Curé what he thought of my condition: 'Alas! my friend,' said the *good Father*, 'your poor wife is very ill! . . . But we are going to pray for her. To-morrow I will say Mass for her intention at the altar of St. Philomena. Go to Holy Communion there.' After the Mass my husband questioned him afresh. 'My good friend,' replied he, 'God will cure her. I hope that in six weeks you will bring her here.' The holy Curé had spoken truly and six weeks to the day after the prediction I arrived at Ars with my doctor—he came with me fearing an accident, since I had got up of my own accord and he could not believe in my cure. After my arrival M. Vianney came to see me at the house of Madame Liard, where I had put up. He blessed me and said with his celestial smile: 'How we have prayed for you! You are better, but you are still very weak. Come! come! you will be better very soon. God is so good!'

"Next day I assisted at Holy Mass and received Communion from his hands. I cannot describe the delightful time I passed at Ars. I contrived to be found always about the path of the *good Father*; he blessed me every time and said: 'My child, don't remain among the crowd for long. You are still very weak. You have need of great care.' On the days on which he missed me at the catechism he came to see me at my lodgings. 'I was distressed, my child,' said he; 'I thought you might be worse.' His words and presence strengthened me to such a degree that I felt my pains no longer. I could believe that I was already cured.

"But my cure—a real and solid cure—came at the end of eight days. I left Ars filled with graces and benedictions and with a heart overflowing. What more can I tell you, Monsieur le Missionaire? In the midst of overwhelming occupations I enjoy miraculous health. Days pass like hours. I never have enough time to do everything. I must also ask your pardon for the tardiness of my reply and also for my powerlessness to tell you all that this good, this amiable Saint has been to me . . . He is the exact image of our Lord; he has His suave kindness, His divine meekness, His immense charity . . . Although I have seen him so many times I feel that I have not seen him often enough . . . Ars was for me a delightful Thabor. When the grace of the dear Master led me thither I could only repeat: 'My God! my God! how good it is to be here!' For a moment I have re-ascended this Thabor by writing to you . . . but I must needs descend; the works in the plains call me. Perhaps you will be convinced of my good will; and perhaps I, in confiding these souvenirs to you, have accomplished the will of God!"

The events related in the foregoing correspondence happened in the same town ; they are attested by the same witness. Certainly there is sufficient to arouse curiosity and excite the desire of lifting the veils which hide similar secrets elsewhere ! . . . But we must keep within bounds.

"In the month of July, 1842," wrote a respected curé of our own diocese, "I made the pilgrimage to Ars for the first time. I shall never forget the impression I brought away with me. The holy Curé gave his catechism in a large room at the *Providence* ; I had the good fortune to assist at it in the company of some eighty orphans. At the end of it I had a quarter-of-an-hour's conversation with M. Vianney. I had heard of a good deal of discussion from various points of view concerning the miraculous cure of a lady from Bourg, and I told him of some little opposition that the fact had called forth. 'My friend,' replied he, 'let them talk—these worldly people. Alas ! how should they see ? They are blind. Our Lord might work to-day all the miracles He wrought in Judea and they wouldn't believe in them. He to whom all power has been given has never lost that power. For example, last week a poor vine-dresser from the other side of the water (i.e., the Saône) carried in on his shoulders a little boy of twelve, lame in both legs ; he had never yet walked. The good man made a novena to St. Philomena, and his little one was cured on the ninth day. He went back running before him.

" 'In other days our Lord cured the lame, healed the sick and raised the dead. There were people present, people who saw these prodigies with their own eyes and yet didn't believe. My friend, Man is always and everywhere the same. If the good God is powerful the devil has also a power of his own ; and he uses it to blind this poor world.' "

A man came to M. Vianney one day to implore the cure of his child who was lame. The Curé of Ars proposed that he should make his confession. He had considerable difficulty in bringing himself to do so, as his occupation was to play for the village dances, and he was unwilling to give it up. Nevertheless he did it and then grace spoke to his heart, as it always does after this act of humility and repentance. On his return home he took his fiddle, broke it to pieces in the presence of his wife and threw them on the fire. At the same moment his child jumped for joy and cried : "I am cured !"

The following story naturally calls to mind the officer of Capharnaum, who asked of the divine Master the cure of his son with so firm a confidence and a humility so touching. The man of whom we speak was only a simple gendarme, but his faith was just as lively as that of the centurion. He had lately lost his wife ; and all that was left to him was a son of six, whose legs were bent so that he could not walk. His scanty pay would not permit of

keeping a servant, and it seemed as though he would have to leave the service so as to be able to look after the little motherless boy himself. Happily religion came to the rescue. It came into his head to make a pilgrimage to Ars; he obtained three days' leave and repaired to Lyons. While he was at the Lyons-Ars omnibus office several people saw him carrying the child in his arms and remarked: "Where are you off to with the poor little one? You are indeed simple! The Curé of Ars is no doctor. It is to the hospital for incurables that you should take the child." The honest gendarme was not to be turned from his purpose by this chaff; he presented himself to M. Vianney and told his story: "My dear friend," said the holy Curé, "your child will be cured."

While he was yet speaking, a slight cracking noise made itself heard: the deformed limbs became straight and the child began to walk.

In 1848 a young man was thrown from his horse with resulting serious injury. After having appealed to medical science in vain his parents decided to take him to Ars. The unfortunate young man suffered dreadfully during the journey. M. Vianney having advised a novena to the Blessed Virgin and St. Philomena, he was carried to the church every day to make the prescribed prayers. Sometimes his pain was so excruciating as to force heart-rending cries from him. In the first days he had begun his confession, but great obstacles presented themselves to his return to God. The first novena was without result. The patient commenced another in somewhat better dispositions. His condition sensibly improved. He was able to walk with the aid of crutches. A feeling of gratitude led him to make yet a third novena, at the end of which he completed his confession, received Holy Communion in a spirit of genuine piety and found health of soul and body at the same time. He insisted on remaining another fortnight at Ars to receive counsel of his benefactor, during which time he edified everybody by his continual presence in the church, his recollection and fervour.

In the early days of May, 1851, there came to Ars a man in the full vigour of life whose eyes ailed him in consequence of a congestion. The doctors had tried every variety of treatment. After spending two days at Ars and finding no relief he departed in the last stage of discouragement. His young niece—an extremely pious girl—who accompanied him refused to share his want of confidence. She departed with him, but returned as soon as possible and on the advice of M. le Curé made a novena for her uncle's intention. This novena approached its conclusion without the arrival of any satisfactory news. Suddenly M. Vianney said to her: "My child, I think you may go away now. The person in whom you are interested has ceased to suffer." It was true. Arrived at the house of her uncle, the young lady had the happiness of finding him perfectly cured.

This man did not show himself ungrateful ; he returned several times to give thanks to God for his cure in the same place where he had obtained it. In 1855 he had already made the pilgrimage to Ars three times. His eyes were perfectly healthy. "I am convinced," said he, "that it is to the prayers of the venerable Curé of Ars and of my angelic niece that I owe my cure. I attribute it also to the Blessed Virgin, whom I have never ceased to invoke—even when the cares of my business turned me away from my duties. It is to reclaim me that God has permitted this trial . . . I will only occupy myself henceforth with the salvation of my soul."

A man of some position was attacked by a malady which the faculty knew not how to diagnose. There was a profound debility, a general discomfort, a disgust for everything, continual sleeplessness—a state bordering on a wasting away. His mind suffered equally with his body. This unhappy man came to Ars and after a worse night than usual, finding himself too weak and exhausted to go to the church, sent to beg M. Vianney to go and see him. The mere presence of the holy Curé brought relief. He was able to commence his confession, which he completed after fifteen days of retreat. The spiritual exercises, far from fatiguing him, dissipated little by little his incurable languor, until the last vestiges of it vanished. When he left both soul and body were in good condition.

A young widow from Puy-en-Velay went to the hospital in Lyons in hopes of being cured there. For six months she had suffered terribly from a tumour on the knee, which forced her to have recourse to iron supports in order to walk. Obtaining no relief from remedies and the wonderful care of the Sisters of the hospice, she came to Ars. For fifteen days she prayed ; she commended herself to M. le Curé, to St. Philomena, and to our Lord, with whom she was careful to put herself in grace by absolution and Holy Communion. She departed cured, leaving her sticks behind her on the altar of St Philomena.

During her stay at Ars the widow mentioned above had spoken about one of her cousins who for ten years had suffered from a skin disease. While everybody admired his patience none could approach him, so infectious and offensive were his sores. "Perhaps he is even now dead," said the widow, "or perchance abandoned by all . . . Were he to be cured it would be one of the greatest miracles seen yet." Encouraged by the kindness of M. le Curé, she described the sad condition of her relative, whom she commended to him. "Yes, my child," said M. Vianney, "I will pray for him. Give him from me a medal of St. Philomena, and tell him to make a novena to the good little Saint."

She departed quite happy and on arriving at Puy her first visit was made to her cousin. "I am cured," said she, "but the

hospital at Lyons had nothing to do with it. I owe my cure to M. le Curé of Ars. Look ! here is a medal which he told me to give you. Have confidence and make a novena to St. Philomena. He who has cured me will pray for you." The patient commenced his novena with fervour. Very soon he felt better. Three days later he went back to his work.

Here are some other cures duly authenticated :—

On 24th July, 1848, in the chapel of St. Philomena, Françoise Volet (daughter of Jean-Pierre Volet, of the parish of Brullioles, Canton de Saint-Laurent-de-Chamousset), a little girl aged twelve, recovered the use of her legs, of which she had been deprived by illness since she was five months old. She received the Holy Eucharist seated on a chair. A few minutes afterwards she walked in the church without any support whatever.

On 9th August, 1848, in the parish church at Ars, Antoine Cochaud (son of Pierrette Storne, widow of Benoît Cochaud, domiciled at Saint-Julien-en-Jaret, Canton de Saint-Chamond, Loire), aged seven years, recovered the use of his legs by the intercession of St. Philomena. The following is the official attestation of the original condition of the sufferer :

" I have visited the said Antoine Cochaud, aged seven, son of the widow Cochaud, of Saint-Julien-en-Jaret, and I think that an appliance to keep the legs straighter, both when standing and during repose, is absolutely indispensable to him if a curvature more and more pronounced is to be obviated. Besides which the appliance would be useful to counteract the emaciation of the lower limbs, by establishing a more active circulation.

" Saint-Chamond, 23rd April, 1848. PORTIER, Physician."

" Seen by us, the Maire of the town of Saint-Chamond, in order to legalise the signature of Dr. Portier, hereunto appended.

" The Maire of Saint-Chamond.

" 17th July, 1848.

BARBIER (Joanny)."

In August, 1856, a young religious of St. Joseph, of a convent in Ardèche, afflicted with loss of voice, returned perfectly cured. The attestation is to this effect :—

" I, the undersigned, Souchon, Curé of Aujas, Canton de Genolhac (Gard), certify as follows :

" Mademoiselle Marie-Valérie-Hermance Martin, a native of La Plane, in the parish of Aujas, aged twenty, a novice in the Community of St. Joseph, established at Vans (Ardèche), was affected nearly five months ago by complete loss of voice. She went to her home to try the effect of her native air ; her condition grew worse. Having no hope on earth, she turned to heaven for help. She had heard of the marvels of Ars ; she determined to go

there, and she spent two days in prayer at that place. On the third day, Friday, 29th August, she made her confession and Holy Communion. On leaving the church she began to speak. Her voice was as facile and sonorous as before her infirmity. I had seen her previous to her journey—in her family, at my own house, in her convent. I was at Ars at the same time as she was; stayed at the same hotel as her mother, Madame Martin. I assisted at the Mass at which she made her Holy Communion and when she was cured.

“ Besides myself six priests witnessed the miracle, and they united with me in giving thanks to Him who had just manifested His goodness and power at the instance of the venerable Curé of Ars. That day will be without doubt an epoch in their life as it is in my own.

“ Given at Aujas (Gard), this 3rd day of September, 1856,
J. SOUCHON, Curé.”

“ I, the undersigned, Doctor of Medicine, resident at Vans (Ardèche), attest that I attended Mademoiselle Martin, novice at the Convent of St. Joseph, suffering from aphony which resisted several methods of treatment. I was beginning to despair of her cure and suspected an incurable affection of the chest when, after a journey, I found Mademoiselle Martin perfectly cured. I declare that I cannot explain this cure by any natural means.

“ In proof of which I draw up this present report.

B. OLLIER.

“ Vans, 9th January, 1857.”

A letter of 17th August, 1856, written from Ars :—

“ To-day we have had a very remarkable cure : that of a girl from the Alps who had her tongue entirely paralysed for three years after typhoid fever, and was only able to communicate with others by using a slate. After Holy Communion on the day she finished her novena, when she tried to make her thanksgiving, she felt that her tongue articulated the prayers. She has been able to talk from that moment. I have seen and heard her.”

We have seen and heard Rose Eysseric herself at Ars, whither gratitude had led her on the day of M. Vianney's funeral. She spoke quite freely and was able to recount with copious detail the entire history of her cure. The attestation runs thus :—

“ On this twenty-seventh day of March, in the year 1859, we—Jean-Louis Chagnard, Maire and President ; François Berge, Curé ; Jean-François Julien, *Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur* ; Jacques Denizot ; Jean Lombard and Benjamin Pellisier, Communal schoolmaster—all members of the *Conseil de Fabrique* of the parish of Montmorin, Canton de Serres, Diocèse de Gap,

Department of the Hautes-Alpes; certify and attest that it is within our perfect knowledge that Rose Eysseric, aged forty-three years, wife of Noé Arnaud, farmer, living in this parish, had completely lost the faculty of speech since the month of July, 1858. Having exhausted all the resources of medicine without effect, nothing was left but recourse to divine Providence.

"With this object in view the said Eysseric, full of faith, having made a pilgrimage to Ars in the Department of Ain in order to invoke in conjunction with her husband the potent prayers and assistance of the venerable Jean-Marie-Baptiste Vianney, Curé of the said parish, on her return from this pilgrimage and on the third day of a second novena, then being at Valréas (Vaucluse), has recovered her speech miraculously during the night of 23rd inst.—as her husband, a man worthy of all credence, affirms to us. She actually speaks in as clear and distinct a manner as before her paralysis.

"We, the undersigned, are convinced of the reality of the miracle by personal interviews we have had this day with the said Eysseric, the wife of Arnaud.

"The husband and wife Arnaud being here present express the most sincere and lively gratitude to God, St. Philomena and the venerable Curé of Ars, by whose intercession and prayers they declare they have obtained the aforesaid miracle.

"In faith of which we have drawn up the present attestation, sincere and true, which we have signed, together with the said Noé Arnaud.

"Drawn up and executed at Montmorin, at the usual place of our meeting, on the day, month and year mentioned above.

"(Signed) JEAN LOMBARD, FRANÇOIS JULIEN, JACQUES DENIZOT, PELLISIER, F. BERGE, Curé, JEAN-LOUIS CHAGNARD, Maire, NOÉ ARNAUD."

"Nancy, 28th September, 1858.

"Monsieur l'abbé,

"During a visit to Ars I made in August, 1856, M. le Curé gave me a medal of St. Philomena, which he took from his pocket to hand to my sister who was afflicted with epilepsy. As long as my sister carried this medal—that is to say, for more than a year—she had no attack; but she had the misfortune to lose it and the attacks recommenced. I beg you to send me two medals from the hand of your holy Curé. I ask for two, because another person—also epileptic—desires to have one.

"Accept the humble homage of your very devoted servant.

L'abbé PREVOT.

Professor in the Greater Seminary of Nancy (Meurthe)."

"I, the undersigned, Marie-Rose Uzier, of Chantemerle, Canton de Tain (Drôme), declare that I was cured at the intercession of St. Philomena and the prayers of M. le Curé of Ars. I was confined to bed from 18th June, 1856, and abandoned by everyone; I knew not what would become of me . . . Then, towards Christmas, I promised the Holy Family and St. Philomena that if I obtained my cure I would make a pilgrimage to Ars. I began to walk on 20th January, 1857, and on the 22nd I set out for Ars, whence I returned feeling quite well."

Enclosure to the above :—

"I, the undersigned, Doctor of the Faculty of Paris, certify that Rose Uzier (in religion, Sister Arsène), schoolmistress of Chantemerle, suffered for more than six months from articular rheumatism, which rendered all movement impossible.

"In proof of which I give the present certificate,

PIOLLAY.

"Tain, 2nd January, 1857."

"On 21st March, 1857, we, the undersigned, Missionary and Vicar of Ars; and Carrier, Curé of Misérieux; declare that we saw Joseph Joly and Marie Défosse (Madame Pigeat), his mother-in-law, in the act of thanking M. Vianney, Curé of Ars, for the instantaneous cure of Antoine, son of Joseph Joly, day-labourer of Saint-Amand (Cher), who had never walked in his life. This child was five-and-a-half years of age and had lost his power of walking by reason of convulsions when but five years old.

CARRIER, Curé. TOCCANIER, Missionary.

JOSEPH JOLY. MARIE DEFOSSE."

"Marseilles, 16th August, 1857.

"Monsieur et cher confrère,

"I reply—rather late—to the request you made of me for a certificate establishing the malady and cure of Madame Daumas . . . I have seen this lady; she has told me of her cure, which seems to me complete. But the doctor, whom I know intimately, would not give a certificate, on the grounds that he has not attended the case officially . . . Happily the good God has no need of this attestation to establish the power and sanctity of the venerable Curé of Ars.

JUJAN."

A year after this letter M. Toccanier received a certificate, bearing numerous signatures, which guaranteed the reality of the cure :—

"I, the undersigned, declare that I had a disease of the spinal marrow considered incurable by the physicians. When I went to

Ars, on 20th June, 1857, M. Vianney encouraged me and caused me to make a novena to St. Philomena.

"The day after my interview with this good priest all the pains I had felt the previous evening had disappeared and since that time I have always had perfect freedom of movement.

"On the last day of the novena I made the pilgrimage to Notre-Dame de la Garde on foot and without support in company with my family and several of my friends.

F. DAUMAS."

"The undersigned declare that they are perfectly cognisant of the original condition of Madame Rimbaud (wife of Daumas), whose malady had deprived her of the use of her legs. They further certify that since her return from Ars she has never ceased to enjoy the best of health.

J. DAUMAS, F. DAUMAS, CONSTANT, Merchant,
A. ROCHEBRUNE, DOMINIQUE CARLE, SALOMÉ,
A. AUDIER, J. B. GODREAU, SUBLET, GONTRO,
ANT. LEVESY, J. B. GAUTHIER.

"Given at Marseilles, this 3rd day of July, 1858."

In the month of February, 1857, a working woman came to Ars, carrying on her back a child of eight, who could not walk. For twenty-four hours did this woman dog the footsteps of M. le Curé with the obstinacy of despair, stand sentry at the door of his confessional and throw herself in his path whenever he appeared, showing him her child with look and gesture more expressive than anything she could say. Nothing could have been more pitiable and touching than this couple, and we had not the heart to do the same as the Apostles, who, troubled by the cries of the Canaanite woman, would have had the Master send her away.

M. Vianney frequently blessed the child and he addressed a few words of consolation and hope to the mother. When they went back to their lodging for the night the child said: "Mother, will you please buy me some *sabots*, for M. le Curé has promised me that I shall walk to-morrow." Whether the holy Curé really had made a promise or whether it was merely naïve confidence born of the encouragement he had given—in any case, on the advice of the people with whom the unfortunate pair was staying, the *sabots* were purchased.

Next day, to the stupefaction of all, the child whom they had seen carried in his mother's arms ran into the church like a hare, saying to anyone who cared to listen: "I am cured! I am cured!" The poor mother hid herself in one of the side-chapels to weep over her release from her trouble. We saw her, we questioned her, we wanted to present her to the holy Curé just at the moment when he was vesting for Mass. The woman wished to

see him, to speak to him, to cast herself at his feet ; her gratitude was choking her. M. Vianney received our request with such a cold—almost severe—silence as did not allow us to insist.

After Mass we made a more successful attempt. "Monsieur le Curé, this woman begs you to help her thank St. Philomena." He turned and blessed both mother and child in silence. Then, with a disappointed air, he said in a tone of displeasure : "St. Philomena really ought to have cured this little one at home !"

A month after the event we received this letter :—

"Monsieur le Missionaire,

"Agreeably to the desire you expressed on my departure I write to give you news of my little boy and to assure you that he is perfectly cured. He has had no return of the trouble. He goes, comes and runs as though there had never been anything the matter with him. And yet the doctors despaired of him !. . . I am indeed a happy woman !

"Accept the most sincere thanks for all your goodness of your very humble and respectful servant,

F. DEVOLUET."

In December, 1857, a religious of the Sainte-Enfance de Valence came to Ars. Her right arm was completely paralysed ; the fingers shrivelled and knotted, were useless. Her food had to be cut for her and assistance given in every way. She made a novena which ended on the feast of the Holy Innocents. On that day, while praying in the chapel of St. Philomena, the book which she held in her left hand slipped from her grasp, and the right hand—motionless for so long—instinctively extended to pick it up. She was cured.

About the same time a woman brought her child, who had a large growth over the eye. She stationed herself on the path from the church to the presbytery and showing her little boy to M. le Curé asked him to be so kind as to touch the wen that so disfigured her son. M. Vianney placed a finger upon this wen and it disappeared instantly.

In the summer of 1858 there was an instantaneous cure that was witnessed by all the pilgrims and people of Ars. This was the case of a young man from Puy-de-Dôme, who only walked with difficulty by the help of crutches. He presented himself to the servant of God with : "Father, do you think I might leave my crutches here ?" "Alas ! my friend, you seem to have great need of them," replied the holy Curé. But the poor sufferer was not to be rebuffed. Every time he got the chance he repeated his question. Then, on the feast of the Assumption, at the time when the congregation was assembling for the evening service he seized upon M. Vianney on his way from the sacristy to the

choir with the eternal question: "Father, may I discard my crutches?" "Well! my friend, if you have the faith, yes," was the reply. At the same instant the young man began to walk, to the great astonishment of all present; and went to lay his crutches at the foot of the altar of St. Philomena, and has never had any more need of them. In his gratitude he has since made his profession at Belley in the Institute of the Brothers of the Holy Family.

On the twenty-eighth of the same month there came a paralytic to Ars. This unfortunate belonged to Cette, and was hardly capable of any movement—her articulation being attended by horrible contortions. After seeing M. le Curé she assisted at Mass in the Lady chapel and approached the Holy Table, painfully dragging herself along on crutches. But hardly had she received our Lord than she found that she was cured. There was such an unrestrained movement of admiration in the church that M. Vianney was forced to desist, and finish giving Holy Communion presently after Mass.

On 6th September, 1858, the Curé of Cébazat, in the diocese of Clermont, wrote to the Abbé Toccanier:—

"Mon vénérable confrère,

"May I ask you to help to thank the good God who deigned three weeks ago to restore the health of one of my young parishioners miraculously by the intercession of St. Philomena?"

A month later the following certificate was received:—

"We, the Curé of Cébazat, have the honour of certifying that one Charles, nineteen years of age, son of Jean Blazy and Marie Verdier, had been deprived of the use of his legs since 2nd May, 1855, from which date down to the first days of April of the present year 1858 he was confined to bed, unable to bear other than a horizontal position, afflicted with violent colic, and deriving no benefit from different methods of treatment which have been employed, and notably that of the thermal waters of Royat and Mont-Dore:

"That in the first days of April—after a novena to St. Philomena made in union with the holy Curé of Ars—he was able to walk a few paces by the aid of crutches and to drag himself with much difficulty as far as the church which is quite near his home.

"That at the beginning of August—being desirous of going to Ars to commend himself to the venerable Curé of that parish—he was obliged to be conveyed to the railway-station at Clermont in a carriage, as his legs were unable to carry him.

"That the said Charles Blazy has returned from Ars completely cured, having left his crutches in the chapel of St. Philomena, after the Communion with which the exercises of his novena concluded: that since the feast of 15th August he has felt no pain:

that after his return he was able to take a walk of eighteen kilometres : that he has enjoyed better health than ever.

" I am pleased to proclaim the manifestly miraculous nature of this cure. What I affirm can also be affirmed by all the inhabitants of Cébazat, as they were aware of the pitiable condition of the young man.

" I forward the present certificate in order to give glory to God, whose goodness is immense and whose power is infinite.

" Cébazat, 8th September, 1858.

BAZIN, Curé of Cébazat."

" Seen for the legalisation of the signature of M. Bazin, Curé of Cébazat,

" Évêché de Clermont-Ferrand, 1st October, 1858.

DUCHER, Canon, Secretary."

(Forty-five signatures are appended, among which those of Baron Jules de Vissac and the Comte de Neuville).

To this first certificate was annexed one from the Maire of the Commune of Cébazat, which goes to establish the same facts, to wit :—

" Charles Blazy was confined to bed for three years by a disease which it belongs to the medical profession to define. His pains were so severe and continual that he was always compelled to remain lying on his back without being capable of using his legs.

" At Easter finding some little relief, he made an effort and by the use of crutches contrived to drag himself through the streets of the village. Then giving up all hope in the faculty, he left for Ars, and after some weeks we learned that he was radically cured and had laid aside his crutches.

" This was doubted at first ; but when Blazy appeared and was seen to use his legs as though nothing had ever ailed him the major part of the inhabitants admitted the miracle.

" Such are the facts which we can conscientiously attest—happy to see that virtue is sometimes rewarded in this life.

C. LOIRE, Maire of Cébazat.

RIGAUD, Deputy Maire, and more than fifty notable inhabitants."

These two documents were accompanied by a letter in which Jean Blazy, the father of the young man, excuses himself for his inability to complete the statement by an attestation from the doctor :—

" He put me off till after the winter " writes the good man ; " then, when my son renewed his request, the doctor declared in the presence of M. le Curé and that of the Superior of the Con-

vent that the cure was extraordinary and of the nature of the miraculous—a reflection that caused him to seek an excuse for refusing the certificate asked for. This excuse is that he had not visited the patient previous to his departure. But on the very day of his return Charles went to see the doctor. The latter made him undress, examined him carefully, caused him to walk in his presence, and said that he might well return thanks to God for so great a favour; after which he added: ‘You have never walked so well as you do now.’ But he did not perhaps anticipate that the cure of my son would make such a sensation. It certainly has done much for the glory of God and the honour of St. Philomena. Since Charles came back no day passes without his receiving a great number of visits. People come to see him from every direction. Many of them have been to Ars, others intend to go. Devotion to St. Philomena has increased immensely in consequence of this miracle. We have the pleasure of seeing the good Saint in our church. On the day of the Mass of Thanksgiving we offered her a little heart in silver, and we have placed a lamp before her statue which will burn day and night. Already several persons wish to contribute towards the upkeep of this lamp and have offered us oil. Charles has given some of that which he brought back from Ars to sundry of the sick; all have found great relief from it. To our knowledge this oil has cured obstinate sores and very dangerous maladies. One of these patients thus cured has offered a silver heart and three gold chains out of gratitude to St. Philomena.

“We are sending you these sheets covered with signatures, among which will be found those of all the municipal councillors and persons of high rank. We think that this will suffice; otherwise the entire commune would have signed, for there is nobody who does not know that my son spent three years without rising from his bed. Charles keeps well always; he thanks God with all his heart for the great favour he has received and commends himself to the prayers of the venerable Curé of Ars.

JEAN BLAZY.”

On 21st May, 1859, the Abbé Toccanier received yet another letter from Cébazat—from the brother of Charles Blazy, in which he says:—

“After my brother had used some of the oil which had burned before St. Philomena—I ought to say they had given him nearly a spoonful, which he applied for nine days without being able to perceive that it grew less—he decided on 6th August to set out for Ars.

“As regards myself, I had also an infirmity which M. Fournier the surgeon told me was extremely serious—a strangulated hernia,

that he had had much difficulty in replacing. In giving me a truss he forbade me to leave it off day or night. On my mother objecting that it would be very inconvenient at night he replied that he had no choice, as the hernia was a very bad one.

“ When my brother left for Ars I told him to ask M. le Curé what prayers I ought to say in order to obtain a cure. On the advice of M. le Curé my brother wrote to say that I must make a novena to St. Philomena very exactly. On the ninth day I felt I was cured and could leave off my truss. From that time I have had no more trouble. Never can we thank the good God sufficiently for having vouchsafed us such miracles by the intercession of the Blessed Virgin and St. Philomena.”

There are some privileged families who draw down the graces and blessings of Almighty God by their simplicity and uprightness. No doubt but that we are here brought face to face with one of them. The Maire of Cébazat evidently recognised the fact, and said so in his formal attestation : *happy to see that virtue is sometimes rewarded in this life.*

Here is a report not less interesting, which we owe to the gratitude of the person who was the object of the miracle :—

“ La Palud, 2nd October, 1858.

“ Mon Père,

“ Before leaving Ars I promised to send you a report on my long illness and of the extraordinary cure I obtained from God at the end of a novena in honour of St. Philomena. Now that the miracle is beyond all doubt I set myself to fulfil this duty of gratitude to our Lord and His glorious servant . . .

“ My malady, which lasted nearly eight years, was judged to be incurable by the physicians I consulted and who followed its course. All the hope they could give me was that care might ameliorate my condition somewhat and give me a little relief. For the rest, I will describe the different stages of this malady and you will judge for yourself.

“ It was in December, 1850, that I felt the first symptoms. I began to have internal pains and violent headaches ; I became so supersensitive that the smallest contradiction or the least surprise occasioned the most severe sufferings. I kept my room or my bed until 18th March, 1851. On that day I managed to go out of doors : La Palud kept high festival ; the Archbishop of Avignon was there. On 8th December, 1851, the disease declared itself in good earnest ; I had to be put to bed, and there I remained until 24th. On the ensuing 19th January I went back to bed again, and thereafter nervous spasms set in, which hardly ever left me. These spasms resembled fainting-fits and occurred from hour to hour,

“ Thinking that my condition was serious and finding that the treatment hitherto pursued had been to no purpose I thought I ought to consult one of the highest medical authorities in Avignon. Dr. Béchet came to see me and treated me homœopathically. The malady appeared to yield, the spasms became less frequent ; but they soon regained their former intensity, and in the month of April they became insupportable. Up to this time I had had as many as nineteen attacks in one day and the mean duration of each was twelve to fifteen minutes.

“ On 15th May, 1852, I was seized with a terrible cough, which was not so much a cough as a continued roaring ; it lasted four days and only yielded to energetic treatment, which gave the malady a new character, or rather restored the original one. I now had fainting-fits instead of spasms, and with the same frequency. In October I decided to go to Avignon, so as to be near Dr. Béchet, who up to now had only visited me at rare intervals.

“ Towards the middle of 1853 the fainting-fits ceased and were replaced by a spasmodic hiccough which the faculty dignified by the name of eructations. In the early days a foam issued from my lips resembling soapy water. In June I returned to La Palud. The eructations were less frequent, but accompanied by crises which rendered me so sensitive that the least noise caused me to utter piercing cries. This state lasted over a year. In July, 1856, seeing that my condition was seriously alarming my relatives, I left for Montpellier. The new treatment I followed there was very favourable. The crises and eructations diminished ; at the end of a month they had ceased. But the weakness of my legs increased ; and became so great that I could not remain even sitting.

“ Towards the opening of the following year strength returned bit by bit and in April I could walk a few paces with the aid of a friendly arm. The improvement continued as far as being able to take a short walk now and then. True I could not go alone and always had need of help. But this amelioration did not last long. About the end of September I went back to bed. Together with the spasms, the fainting fits and eructations returned—the whole accompanied by a greater sensibility than I had experienced at first.

“ In June next year I returned to Montpellier. Thanks to the care of Dr. Vailhé I had strength enough to go to Mass on the feast of the Assumption ; I was able to go out a little—walking slowly and always assisted.

“ In September my doctor advised me to go to the baths of La Malou. When I came back I was much better : but this did not continue. At the end of a month all the former symptoms had re-appeared and with the same intensity but less frequency.

“ Mindful of the temporary benefit I had derived from the

baths, I returned to La Malou in the following year: I derived good from it, but it was less noticeable. The same happened after a third course of baths which I took as lately as last June-July.

“ During this present year 1858 I have had crises as frequently as before, and after each I had to keep my bed. On Christmas Day I went to church in a carriage, the symptoms re-appeared with violence and I had to be carried home and put to bed, where I remained over a month.

“ To complete the account I may add that during this eight years of suffering I have never been able to read nor even to listen to a reader; I could never kneel; and whenever a better turn allowed me to walk I always had need of a strong arm, however short the distance. Nor could I retain the smallest amount of food, while the slightest touch would draw cries of pain. At the beginning of my illness I was so weak as to be unable to use my hands for any purpose.

“ Such, Father, has been my state of health for the last eight years. I have exaggerated nothing; indeed I have understated the matter.

“ Now, in order to remedy such a deplorable condition, nothing has been left undone; and although science has been able to procure for me—at intervals and for brief periods—some little relief, it has been powerless to cure me. I had no resource but Almighty God and no remedy other than patience and resignation. For a long time I thought of throwing myself at the feet of the venerable Curé of Ars; but one thing and another prevented it. It may be that God wished it so, in order to compel me to exhaust every human means, and in recognising their impotence lead me to place all my confidence in Him.

“ I left for Ars on 18th August last. It was then a month since I had returned from La Malou, and the slight improvement I thought had followed my treatment there had disappeared and the three days immediately preceding my departure had been spent in bed. As far as Villefranche my journey was prosperous, nothing untoward happened. When I arrived there I was seized with a nervous cough of the most violent description, with which I only parted company at Ars. I went to bed and had a very bad night. This attack was so bad and shook me so much that it led to a return of all the symptoms I had previously experienced during my long illness and others besides.

“ To my shame I confess it: discouragement settled upon me; and the grace I asked of God was strength to get back to La Palud as quickly as possible, so that I might not die so far away from my family in a country where I was quite unknown. With the strength that I asked of Him God gave me an interior inspiration to remain at Ars and have confidence. I was able to see

M. Vianney on 21st August. In a brief interview I explained the object of my journey and earnestly besought the help of his prayers that I might be able to kneel, read, listen to a reader, and assist at the Holy Mass and sermon. He gave me a medal of St. Philomena, advised me to make a novena in honour of the Saint, and said on leaving : ' I will keep you in mind. If you have faith you will be cured.' These last words recalled those of the Saviour : ' All things are possible to him that believeth.' And I asked the good Jesus to increase my faith.

" I commenced my novena the same day—it was a Saturday. On 23rd August I wanted to see M. Vianney and I spent seven hours in waiting, seated on a simple chair. Next day I waited six hours ; the day after five, and it was always in vain. But what astonished me more than anything was that this protracted waiting caused me no fatigue.

" I may mention *en passant* during the course of my novena whenever I felt any pain I applied a drop of oil from the lamp of St. Philomena to the part affected and relief followed instantly.

" On Friday, 27th August, I was so happy as to see M. le Curé. I asked him if he thought that St. Philomena would soon give me the grace of which I was in search. He replied : ' Yes, my child, if you have faith.' And indeed this grace was not long in coming. Next day I felt the truth of the promise he had made the night before ; I could kneel up the necessary time to recite the prayers of the novena. Then Sunday came—the day on which the novena was to finish. I wanted to have the happiness of assisting at the Mass of the holy Curé. At the elevation I knelt without any difficulty ; I felt transported beyond myself and I would go to the Holy Table alone : I got there, despite the crowd who pushed and pressed me from every direction. After Holy Communion I returned to my place unassisted and remained there for some little time prostrate.

" In the course of that memorable day I did many things which left no manner of doubt as to the reality of my cure : I walked alone repeatedly ; went to the church ; knelt on the paved floor and remained a long time in that uncomfortable position. In the morning I listened to a sermon, at one o'clock I assisted at the catechism of M. le Curé, and in the evening I heard another sermon. It was eight years since I had heard anyone preach. Vespers I spent in the chapel of Notre-Dame de Piété on my knees ; then I made the Stations of the Way of the Cross and did some reading. Full of gratitude for the favour which had just been accorded to me and which I had merited so little, I commenced a novena of thanksgiving that same day, which I continued on my arrival at La Palud.

" Since then I have felt no more pain ; my strength, so sorely tried by eight years of suffering, has returned to me and can always

be relied upon. I venture to think that I have more courage than before my illness : you will see whether this is presumption or no. While at Lyons I paid a visit to Fourvières and made the ascent of the holy mountain on foot and without feeling any fatigue. After praying in the venerated sanctuary of the Mother of God I prolonged my walk as far as the cemetery at Loyasse, and returned to my hotel in the Place Bellecour via Fourvières—thus with other walks in Lyons completing a distance of ten to twelve kilometres. You will allow that this is a good test.

“ And now, Father, I will close by saying that on 12th September—the feast of the Holy Name of Mary and of the Congregation of Young Women of La Palud—M. le Curé solemnly blessed a statue of St. Philomena that I brought from Lyons and placed in the church. He wished this statue to be carried in with solemnity, and I had considerable trouble in improvising a litter for the purpose, but I can assure you that it was a great happiness for me to pay even this poor tribute of gratitude to my benefactress. I claimed the honour of acting as bearer in my turn and was in no way fatigued. You see then that I am no longer the same person as I was. On that day I assisted at Vespers for the first time for eight years and bore without shrinking or fainting the sound of the music which was somewhat un subdued.

“ How happy I am, Father ! All glory to St. Philomena ! May the beloved Saint fill up the measure of her favours by obtaining for me the grace not to use the health that has been restored to me otherwise than for the glory of God.”

This prayer has been heard. For more than five years Mademoiselle Zoé Pradelle was able to devote a health of which she was prodigal and which never gave way, to the service of Jesus Christ, His Church and His poor. No one could understand how she managed to carry out all she set herself to do ; but everyone recognised that though she might not find sufficient time for food and sleep she never failed to find leisure for her devotions, to visit and care for the sick and prepare them to make a good end, as well as to be the life and soul of all the good works that sprang up around her.

The following are the documents in this case :—

“ We, the undersigned, Curé of the Parish of La Palud, Honorary Canon of Avignon, etc., and We, also undersigned, Vicaire of the said Parish, complying with the request made to us by the honourable family of Pradelle—one of the most distinguished in the parish—do certify and attest to all whom it may concern :

“ That it is within our knowledge and also a matter of public notoriety that Mademoiselle Zoé Pradelle, aged thirty-two, was attacked about eight years ago by a chronic nervous malady which rendered her absolutely incapable of the use of her powers of locomotion :

"Further that this malady resisted all the efforts of the medical art, and that at Montpellier, where she placed herself in the hands of the most skilful physicians, her health received no more than an equivocal benefit.

"That eventually the said lady—full of faith and piety—understanding every natural means of recovering her health to be in vain, resolved to undertake a journey to Ars, the worthy pastor of which place is venerated throughout all France ; there to entreat the help of his prayers and the grace of his counsel :

"That at the conclusion of the exercises of a pious novena she found herself suddenly and miraculously cured, to the unbounded astonishment of those who had known and had had to do with her. And on her return to her native parish we were able to assure ourselves of the reality of her cure and to be satisfied that the health of the said lady leaves nothing to be desired.

"Wherefore, such being the facts, we have drawn up and signed the present certificate in testimony thereto, protesting that with heart and soul we leave to competent authority the duty of attaching to this extraordinary cure such theological explanation as shall seem to be due.

"Given at La Palud, 21st September, 1858.

E. V. ROSE, Curé, Hon. Can.

L. PERROT, Vicaire."

"I, the undersigned, Doctor in Medicine, resident at Avignon, certify that Mademoiselle Zoé Pradelle, aged thirty-two years, was attacked about eight years since by a nervous disease, the result of defective innervation, possibly in the visceral nervous system, possibly in a nervous system having relation thereto.

"This disease manifested itself in a species of sensibility, such that the least noise or the slightest mental emotion caused an increase of pain in the epigastrium and diminished its muscular power.

"Habitually she was unable to take more than a very small quantity of carefully selected food ; she was unable to read or be read to ; she could not walk without assistance—that is when she was able to walk at all, for she remained three years and a half absolutely deprived of the faculty of doing so.

"I was cognisant of her condition for nearly six years, and it never varied much. Although there was a sensible improvement while under my care, she could never walk alone, kneel, nor abandon her habitual regime of invalid.

"Nor has the varied medical treatment to which she was subjected produced any greater result. A long stay at Montpellier, several seasons passed at the baths of La Malou, have done nothing more than hinder the disease falling into its original state—a state to which her health has always seemed disposed, for the

longer the patient remained away from the baths the more enfeebled she became.

"It is about six weeks since I saw Mademoiselle Zoé on her return from La Malou. She was then suffering much as usual. She came to me to-day in a state of perfect health, of which I am the better able to form an opinion as she has spent twenty-four hours with my family. This patient, who is in the enjoyment of every attribute of the most vigorous health, affirms that it has been suddenly restored at the conclusion of a novena made with the Curé of Ars.

"Incompetent to decide the matter, I abstain, and confine myself to bearing witness to the inexplicable change that has been brought about in Mademoiselle Zoé Pradelle.

"Avignon, 7th September, 1858.

BÉCHET, Physician."

We received from the Curé of Saint-Julien-sous-Montmelas, in Beaujolais, the following letter, under date of 18th July, 1859 :

"Monsieur,

"I learn that you desire to be informed as to the extraordinary cure of a person in my parish. I hasten to meet your wishes by placing the facts before you in all their simplicity. They are attested by only a few people, though they could be so by many others. I know that doctors profess to explain the matter in a natural manner. This sort of malady they say has its origin in the brain ; and the sudden strain on the nerves exerted by a boundless confidence produces relief. But I am only the narrator : here is the story :

"Marguerite Bonnevais, wife of Pierre Dumont, vine-dresser, the mother of eleven children, was afflicted for nine years with nervous crises which had sometimes caused fears for her life. She had consulted Drs. Guillot of Villefranche, Antoine of Salles, Armand and Burnier of Denicé. These gentlemen effected little improvement ; Dr. Burnier even told her there was no remedy at all. Then a sudden idea occurred to the poor woman, that of sending someone to Ars and of going there herself as soon as she could bear the fatigue of the journey. She left 3rd May, 1858, and was installed in a room at the house of the widow Vesin. Her crises were extremely violent. Two days after her arrival she was visited by the Curé ; he was very much moved when he witnessed her sufferings ; he approached her bed and said a short prayer, after which the patient spoke. Her first words were : 'How I suffer !' 'Never mind, my child,' said M. le Curé, 'you will soon be well.' And indeed at that moment the crises ceased. Full of joy, Marguerite went to Communion at the church. Next day, 16th May, she felt sufficiently well to return to Saint-Julien on foot. She was compelled to drive,

on account of the bad weather, and arrived in the midst of her family, bringing joy and gladness with her. Her cure has since been perfectly sustained.

PARCELY, father ; PARCELY, son ; BLONDEL, DUPONT, MOLOXAY, JEANNOT, J. DUPONT, M. DUPONT, J. A. FAYOLLE, C. GIRAUD, Sister CLOTILDE, FAYOLLIÉ, Curé."

* * * *

Over and above these testimonials—of which the series is by no means exhausted—comes the voice of public opinion which proclaims that at Ars there was a superhuman power which manifested itself by prodigies. Every year thousands of sick hastened there from the most distant countries with a confidence that never flagged for thirty years and which it often pleased God to reward. No doubt everybody did not recover the health he sought ; but all found according to the measure of their faith the graces of resignation and fortitude, a higher idea of the Christian doctrine of suffering, together with a clearer conception of the privileges attached to it. No one that we know of came away empty-handed.

The Curé of Ars received all kindly ; he visited, consoled and encouraged ; he gave them the greater part of his time, his prayers and his counsels ; but he did not promise that everyone should be cured. We knew a person, tried by long and ineffable sufferings, of whom we often spoke to him, now to obtain a memento before our Lord, now to get a few words of hope to convey to this angel of sweetness and piety. We never had any other reply than this : " It is a cross well placed." " But she suffers so ! Is there no hope of relief for her ?" " Yes, my friend—in heaven."

This was his usual response when he was questioned about some individual whom he knew he was not to cure : " Patience ! In paradise he will suffer no more."

There is now (1861) in Ars a poor paralytic who—like that other one in the Gospel—is still waiting for his cure. He spends his time in alternately quarrelling and making friends with St. Philomena, according as his soul descends or ascends in the scale of resignation. Generally speaking he is a model of conformity to the will of God and a rare example of what faith can do to sweeten the most bitter trials and render them supportable. This good fellow was always—as he still remains—convinced that the Curé of Ars had but to will his cure for it to come about, " but," as he said, " his humility spoils his charity." M. Vianney often went to visit him at his humble lodging. He exhorted him, cheered him up, made him laugh—for poor Michael laughed readily enough ; but he never held out the faintest hope of a cure. On the contrary, if spoken to about the prayers and desires of his obstinate client he would reply : " Michael doesn't want his

legs to go to heaven. He will go there without them ; and he might not have got there with them."

In speaking of another patient who showed not less persistence than Michael in hoping against hope, he remarked : " St. Philomena has already cured him once, and he hasn't profited by it. I doubt if she would venture to try again."

A sick religious was sent to Ars by his Superior, who greatly desired his cure. The holy Curé said to him : " My friend, we must wish what the good God wishes. He wishes to sanctify you by patience. At the hour of your death you will see that you have saved more souls by this illness than by all the good works you might have accomplished in health."

The Superior was not to be discouraged and by his orders the invalid returned to Ars two years later. " No, no," said M. Vianey again, " you must remain as you are. You are more useful to your Congregation, you are doing more good, you are saving more souls." The companion of the religious having observed that the Superior had great need of him, the Curé made a gesture as who should say : God has no need of anybody. Then he added : " We must see these matters in God ; we must enter into the ways of God."

A last word before we close this chapter. The worldly-minded will not believe these things ; but Christians who know how God prizes humility will have no difficulty in doing so. They understand what it costs to be a saint, and they esteem the cure of a desperate malady to be a lesser miracle than that of a man completely dead to himself, never seeking self in anything, humble and uncomplaining even under humiliation itself, and happy to suffer in the midst of continual sufferings. To those who find difficulty in accepting the accounts and proofs we have just exhibited we content ourselves by recalling the fact that for half-a-century there was at Ars a miracle more astonishing than any or all of the facts which they doubt and deny : the miracle of this man so austere and yet so kind, so sweet and yet so strong, so simple and yet so enlightened, so candid, so full of amiable gaiety and invincible courage ; who bore all contradiction and supported every pain without a word of complaint and without being anything but his equable self from day to day ; who was humble in the plenitude of the gifts of God and the radiance of a popularity to which that of the most renowned of his contemporaries is as nothing ; who lived for forty years almost without food, rest or sleep, with a working-day of sixteen to eighteen hours ; and who finished his career of suffering, fatigue and glory without allowing a sign of impatience to escape him or yielding to a movement of pride—in very truth if this *good Saint* wrought miracles, it was not of his own doing and certainly not to his own advantage. Of all the crosses he had to bear this one was assuredly the heaviest,

By reason of the gift of miracles he was sorely exercised in patience, dismayed in his humility, and tyrannised over by the exigencies of the crowd. We can understand his plaint to St. Philomena that she multiplied them too greatly ; that he should have conjured her to work them at a distance, in private, unperceived by the world, and not to concern herself with bodies, but rather manifest her power over souls—it is all summed up in a sentence of his own, both naïve and charming : ST. PHILOMENA REALLY OUGHT TO HAVE CURED THIS LITTLE ONE AT HOME.



Interior of the old Church at Ars.

Interior of the old Church at Ars.

CHAPTER XXXI

SOME OF THE CONVERSIONS EFFECTED AT ARS

I will seek that which was lost : and that which was driven away, I will bring again : and I will bind up that which was broken, and I will strengthen that which was weak. (Ezech. xxxiv., 16.)

I say to you, that even so there shall be joy in heaven . . . (Luke xv., 7.)

IN the preceding chapter we have narrated facts, quoted names and dates, called witnesses, furnished proofs ; but nevertheless we do not flatter ourself that we have convinced those of our readers who wish to believe in God, but only on condition that He is a God who works no miracles. Had they lived at the time of our Lord they would doubtless have thought it wholly unreasonable that He should restore sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, and power to the paralytics.

We may permit ourself to make this simple remark : that by denying the reality of the cures wrought at Ars, by combating the evidence and disregarding the witnesses we have by no means finished with miracles. In the depths of the human heart miracles abound. Every man in whom the Christian faith has become extinct and who by a sudden light has felt it revive in his soul when he seriously entered into himself in good faith becomes a living miracle unto himself. The man was deaf and he hears ; blind and now he can see ; paralysed and behold ! he walks ; his tongue was tied and it is unloosed—he was dead and a word from on high has raised him to life. No outward prodigy is comparable to this one. It is this that St. Thomas had in his mind when he said that the conversion of a sinner is the greatest work of God. Well, then ! this is just what happened at Ars for thirty years in respect of thousands of souls—another fact for the incredulous reader to battle against.

Someone has said that for him who really loves God there is only one word in every language on earth : Conversion. Also that it is to the conversion of sinners that all the saints were devoted. This was the object on which every thought of the Curé of Ars was centred and the work for which he spent all his time and strength. We may assume that during the fifteen or sixteen hours which he passed daily in the confessional he heard on an average a hundred penitents—an estimate which is only approximate, but in any case very moderate—what a total at the end of a year ! And he lived that life for thirty years ! Do the annals of the Catholic priesthood produce anything like it ?

“ It will never be known in this world,” said M. Vianney, one

day, "how many sinners have found salvation at Ars! The good God, who has need of no one, makes use of me for this great work, although I am a very ignorant priest. Had He but found a more miserable instrument He would have taken him and effected a hundred times more good by his means."

Generally speaking the Curé of Ars found men facile, well-disposed, prepared to accept the truth and for the conquest he desired to make of their souls. The Lord Jesus had so ordained that this heart so humble and so sweet should enter into the joy of that empire promised to the virtue of meekness.

Reserving for himself the saintly violence that storms the heavens, M. Vianney shed on all who approached him a spirit of meekness and of the peace that possesses the earth. With what tenderness did his heart not open to poor sinners! the desire to weep was always the first thing that seized him in their presence. He wept with them, he wept over them, his eyes were constantly filled with tears, and so sweet and so moving did he seem to be that he converted as much by his look as by his words. But when he spoke it was in words that went straight to the heart.

"What a pity!" he would cry, "Even if the good God were not so good! . . . but He is so good! . . . Man must needs be a barbarian to offend so good a Father! . . . No, one cannot understand such wickedness and ingratitude! . . . It is faith that is wanting to us . . . We shall understand that some day, but it will be too late . . . My God! what can we love then, if we cannot love Him who is love itself? . . . We fly our friend and love our executioner . . . How sad that is! . . . No, the sinner is really too miserable! . . ."

And his voice would be drowned in tears, which he would brush from his cheeks with the back of his hand. One day they flowed with more than usual bitterness over a poor sinner kneeling at his feet; and towards the end the latter, who had thus far been hard and unmoved, felt touched. Regarding his confessor with astonishment, he asked: "But, Father, why do you weep so?" "Ah! my friend," replied the holy priest, "I weep because you do not weep."

It is clear that it was not so much by studied eloquence and tricks of rhetoric that the Curé of Ars moved, enlightened and transformed souls as by his human sympathy, by the fire that flashed forth from the heart of an apostle, by that divine grace which works of faith and love cause to superabound in the saint and which he diffuses among his hearers. One word—and that of the simplest—coming from the lips of this holy priest, instantly produced miracles, such as all the spiritual books and sermons would never have effected.

"I have sometimes imagined," says Père Gratry, "a state of soul in which it seems as if one had the power of resuscitating

other souls by a sort of irresistible fire that one carries about one." The Curé of Ars carried such a fire with him ; he had in a heart closely united to God all the forces of a love that creates ; and enriched with this treasure he went forth resuscitating the souls of all whom he encountered in his progress. How many souls has he not rescued from eternal death ! For how many souls, again, was he not the bearer of a light that showed them the precipice for which they were making and guided them on their upward flight once more ! And by how many souls was he not loved !

We cannot enter upon the details of each of the innumerable conversions effected at Ars. That is a story that will be told some day—when every witness feels constrained to add his stone to the monument of universal gratitude. But in the meantime we may select a few cases at random from the inexhaustible store of such facts ; or, rather, we will select those in which the action of God appears more manifest, His mercy more gratuitous, and the power for conversion of the holy Curé more evident.

The first conquest M. Vianney made for our Lord was a Jansenist lady of Fareins—imbued to the full with the spirit of that sect, infatuated like all the disciples of the *Bonjour* brothers* at Fareins, and with a pride that can be seen nowhere else.

This woman, whom pride and obstinacy served in lieu of knowledge, was noted for her attachment to error and the indiscreet ardour of her proselytism. Why she came to Ars we know not, but she appeared on a festival of the Blessed Virgin. During Vespers she was seen to watch the holy Curé closely. What was not the astonishment of everybody on seeing her approach the confessional after the service ! Naturally the interview was a long one. Each one asked himself : Will our holy Curé manage to bring this self-willed person to reason ? He did it by dint of patience—his words completed what his mere look had begun. After the necessary probation this lady received the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist ; she was solidly converted. In order to escape the attentions of her late co-religionists she decided to establish herself at Ars, where she became the edification of all. She never ceased to lament her past infidelity and to thank God for having opened her eyes to His light. She expired in the arms of our Lord in dispositions of the most lively faith and ardent charity.

Some time afterwards, when the reputation of M. Vianney commenced to extend, an event took place that made a considerable sensation—the conversion of a savant from Lyons, named Maissiat. The Abbé Gaillard, Curé of Montagnat, happened to be in Ars at the time, and he obtained from the man himself the details of his return to God. This is what M. Maissiat told him :

* The two apostles of Jansenism at Fareins.

"I left Lyons eight days ago for a month's geological excursion in the mountains of Beaujolais and Mâconnais. In the carriage that brought me from Villefranche I chanced to meet an old gentleman of my acquaintance who was going to Ars; and he pressed me to accompany him there. 'Come,' said he, 'and you shall see a Curé who works miracles.' 'Miracles,' said I, laughing, 'I don't believe in miracles.' 'Come, I tell you; you shall see and believe.' 'Oh! for that matter, if you succeed in making a believer of me you may indeed cry "Miracle!"' . . . 'Very well, then; come for a visit to Ars.' 'Ars is a name that pleases me, for I am an artist myself; the place is not very far from the country I want to explore. I will come with you.'

"Arrived here, my friend found a lodging at the house of the widow Gaillard, and we shared the same room. Very early in the morning he woke me with: 'Maissiat, will you do me a favour and come to Mass with me?' 'To Mass, eh? I've not been to Mass since the day of my First Communion. Couldn't you ask something else of me?' 'You'll come to please me. It is during Mass that you will best be able to see and judge of the Curé of Ars. I only ask you to look at him well. I will find you a seat from which you can do this quite at your ease.' 'I care very little about that; but I care very much about obliging you. You wish to take me to Mass, do you? So be it: I am at your disposal.'

"So we went to church, my old friend installing me in a bench that faced the sacristy. Very soon the door opened and the Curé of Ars came out, vested for Mass. His eyes met mine—it was only a glance, yet it penetrated to the depths of my soul. Under that look I felt crushed. I bowed my head and hid my face in my hands. During the whole time of Mass I remained motionless. When it was at an end I tried to lift my heavy head and go out; but on passing the sacristy, where a crowd was pressing, I heard these words: 'Go out all of you.' At the same moment I felt a bony hand take hold of mine and I was drawn as by an irresistible force. The door closed upon me and I found myself face to face with the look that had struck me down. I stammered out: 'Monsieur le Curé, I have a weight on my shoulders which crushes me.' A voice of angelic sweetness that hardly seemed to come from a human breast replied: 'My friend, you must get rid of it as soon as possible. Kneel down and tell me the story of your poor life, and our Lord will relieve you of your burden, for He has said: *Come to me all you that are heavy laden and I will refresh you.*'

"Thereupon my trouble dissipated a little and without advertising to the fact that I was making a confession I began to relate the history of my life from the day of my First Communion. During the whole time he wept over me and now and then ex-

claimed: 'How good God is! how much He has loved you!' As for me, I did not weep; but my burden grew less and by the time I had finished it had disappeared entirely. 'My friend,' said the Curé of Ars, 'you will return to-morrow. At present go to the altar of St. Philomena and beg of her to ask your conversion of our Lord.' I had not wept in the sacristy; but I own that I wept plentifully at the feet of St. Philomena. Oh! what a relief there is in tears sometimes!

"Monsieur l'abbé," added the new convert, addressing his interlocutor, "to-morrow I am to receive absolution and after that the Body of Jesus Christ. Be so good as to say Mass for me, to the end that I may not be entirely unworthy of so great a favour."

M. Maissiat assisted at the Holy Sacrifice, which the Curé of Montagnat offered for his intention, and then received the grace for which he had spent nine days in preparation. Abandoning his learned expedition, he remained some time at Ars and returned home to appreciate the joys of his return to God in solitude. He was a savant and an artist, who had made his First Communion during the Reign of Terror. Orphaned at the age of fifteen, he had been adopted by an officer of rank whom he followed to Egypt. Having first become a Mussulman, he tried Judaism, Protestantism and Mesmerism in turn; he had been a disciple of the Abbé Châtel* and of Père Enfantin†; when he came to Ars he belonged to the religion of Cabet‡. Two years after his conversion he died in the best and happiest dispositions.

Marvellous effect of a single look! Our Lord looked at the two brothers Simon and Andrew, and that look meant eternal salvation to them. He saw a man in a custom-house, and His glance pierced the heart of Matthew the publican. He turned and looked upon St. Peter, and the unfaithful Apostle, realising his fault, went out and wept bitterly. The saints have the same faculty as had the Master—carrying His image in their hearts, they reflect it in their gaze. Under the gaze of the venerable Curé of Ars everyone felt moved—and moved to better things. Many pilgrims have declared that the first time they met the eye of the holy priest they felt carried off their feet, as it were, trans-

* The Abbé Châtel (1795-1857). Founder of the schismatical "French Catholic Church" (1831). He rejected the Infallibility of the Church, abstinence and the celibacy of the clergy. The services were conducted in French. The church would have closed of its own accord, but the Government suppressed it in 1842.

† Père Enfantin (1796-1864). A disciple of the Comte de Saint-Simon, a precursor of Socialism. Saint-Simonism eventually became a sort of church with Enfantin in the rôle of Pope.

‡ Cabet, Etienne, "Democratic Communist," who emigrated to America in 1848, where he founded the sect of "Icarians," who dissolved by mutual consent in 1895.

ported to a level above the miseries of this world, to which they became indifferent; others that they seemed to mount into limitless space and ascend to those regions whence God contemplates the things of earth below.

However it be, it is certain that M. Vianney did not effect good by his word alone; his very look attracted souls and converted them.

In 1838 a man attached to the navigation of the Saône had accompanied some of his friends to Ars. This mariner was largely affected by the indifference and prejudices of his class and period. He had a horror of priests and confession and raged against anyone who ventured to talk of them. He had a complete armoury of sophisms, raillery and blasphemy; and was by no means parsimonious with them on such occasions. On his arrival at Ars curiosity impelled him to pay a visit to the church. He went as far as the choir, where the Curé was hearing the men's confessions; but, seized by a sudden attack of vertigo, he was obliged to retire into the fresh air. But that did not hinder him from returning. A secret instinct urged him towards the place where the mercy of God was awaiting him. At his entry into church this second time he experienced a violent trembling, which extended to his whole person. This agitation was observed by a pious woman who happened to be there. She helped him to recover himself and then took him to M. Vianney, who received him in such a manner as to calm him completely. The sight of this priest, his whole being austere and mortified, his body broken by fasting and labour, made such a powerful impression on him that he decided to make a general confession there and then. During the whole time he was occupied about this confession he was seen to be pious, recollected, prostrate in continual prayer, or reciting his rosary with the fervour of a religious. He received the graces of reconciliation and Communion, and departed a changed man. Some time afterwards he re-appeared at Ars, evincing an astonishing gentleness and the happiest dispositions.

M. Vianney well knew how to give one of those discreet raps at the door of the human heart that cause it to open of its own accord. Thus:—

A young man came to Ars in 1840. He had been brought up at the knee of a pious mother, and been well instructed in the catechism, but, sent early to one of the State colleges, he found himself like so many others of his age in contact with every species of infidelity. For eight years error was presented to him under its most varied and imposing forms. The very habits of good that he had formed by the family hearth turned to his disadvantage. The feelings of deference and respect for authority which had been inspired in him left him defenceless under the instruction of his masters. How was it possible for him to doubt the

word of the distinguished men to whom constituted authority had confided the task of initiating him into the mysteries of science? What right had he—who knew nothing and came to learn—to think himself competent to argue against them or discriminate concerning their teaching? He was unable to withstand the influences by which he was surrounded; and commenced by being ashamed of his beliefs; then he became materialistic and sceptical. Newly released from school, he was about to begin life when he heard about the pilgrimage. He came to Ars in the character of seeker after truth, but hardly expecting to find it there, and more than disposed to laugh at the “comedian” and his “comedy.”

Two cures took place on the day of his arrival. He wanted to deny them, but the more he examined and the more he interrogated the less was it possible for him to doubt that two people, strangers like himself, had come to Ars sick and were going away cured. He decided to have speech with the servant of God: “Sir,” said he, “I have no faith; nevertheless I must confess I am puzzled to account for the cures I have witnessed. I ask nothing better than to believe in something, and I should be obliged if you would tell me how to set about it.”

“My friend,” replied M. Vianney, “*if you set out to meet God, He will come to meet you.* His grace will enlighten your mind and you will believe. You must make your confession.” These words—aided, no doubt, by the silent prayer of the holy priest—went straight to the heart of the incredulous young man. He was agitated, stammered and after a moment’s hesitation fell on his knees. He was seen to leave the confessional with tears in his eyes and a rosary in his hand. He made a stay of a month at Ars, to complete his instruction and fortify himself in the practice of well-doing. When he left, Jesus Christ had gained another adherent.

A short time after the death of M. Vianney we received a long letter from a religious containing an account of his conversion:—

“After my First Communion I was placed as an apprentice with one of my relatives who had no religion at all. His workmen very soon taught me evil, in which I persevered for long years, alas!

“My apprenticeship finished, I returned home. My good mother was not slow to perceive that vice had made terrible ravages in me; and she employed every means that her faith and maternal devotion could suggest to inspire me anew with the love of virtue. Every time that Easter came round she redoubled her solicitude, her entreaties and her prayers. I replied that the time was not yet ripe; that confession was incompatible with my tastes and habits; that it were better to make no

confession at all than make a bad one, like such and such, my companions. The poor woman insisted no further ; but sought refuge in sighs, tears and prayers for my conversion. So she continued to do for four years. What an endless time it must have seemed to her !

“ When I came home unexpectedly in the evening I always found my mother bathed in tears. Like another Monica, she was asking of God the conversion of her Augustine. She reproached herself for having brought into the world a son who was the enemy of God. ‘ O my God,’ she would cry, ‘ if Thou hadst taken him before he was able to offend Thee, I should at least have the consolation of knowing that he is in heaven ! Lord, convert him and call him to Thyself ; but do not permit him to continue offending Thee !’ These words, uttered in a tone of bitter sorrow, produced more effect on me than if I had heard my sentence of death ; but I pretended to feel nothing. The prayers of my mother followed me to my room ; they disturbed my rest. My poor mother had asked me to recite at least three *Ave Marias* in place of the prayers that I could no longer be persuaded to say. I was faithful to this practice, for I have always had—even amid my vagaries—some little devotion to the Blessed Virgin.

“ For some time I had been engaged—unknown to my mother—in certain questionable relations. One evening as I was preparing to go out as usual she said, in a tone I had never heard before, that I must put an end to such a scandalous life. My father—quite indifferent as a rule—had hitherto left me to go my own way ; but on this occasion he asserted himself and with a severity that made me tremble because I was unaccustomed to it said : ‘ Your mother is quite right ; you must have done with it.’ My vexation made me resolve to be a soldier. I met with no opposition ; all was soon arranged, and I set out for Lyons, where I was to get my route-sheet. There I behaved as might have been expected in a scamp such as I was.

“ Next day, on going to see some relatives, I was surprised to find my mother. At the sight of the frivolous air that I thought fit to affect she wept ; then she said that she had come to ask a last act of filial piety of me—that I would go to Ars with her. I burst into such a fit of laughter that it quite disconcerted her. ‘ To Ars ?’ I cried. ‘ Are you really serious in proposing to take me to Ars ? What do you want me to do there ? You know very well that conscripts don’t go to confession.’ ‘ It is not to confession, but to let you see a Saint.’ Then followed entreaties, prayers, tears. At last, as I was really fond of my mother at heart, I gave in. My relative began to chaff me. ‘ Take care that the Curé of Ars doesn’t make a devotee of you.’ ‘ Nothing to fear on that score,’ replied I, with a swaggering air ;

‘the Curé of Ars must be very clever if he contrives to learn anything about my sins.’

“So we took the omnibus to Ars. My mother joined in the conversation with the pious pilgrims, the passengers; and—as always—the conversation turned on the Curé. I took no interest in it and went to sleep. When I woke up we were at the village. Nothing remarkable on our arrival, except perhaps the presence of a few scapegraces, whose acquaintance I soon made. Like myself, they were at Ars solely to please a good mother. Mine was much upset when she saw this new obstacle that threatened her pious designs; she redoubled her fervour and earnestly commended me to the prayers of all the good people she fell in with. As for me, I thought only of amusement; and the idea of a sojourn at Ars bored me.

“Then my mother contrived to speak to the man of God, who bade her be of good cheer. The time for catechism came, and I assisted at it. I was struck by the extreme thinness of M. Vianney, and as I looked our eyes met. His glance was so earnest and so penetrating that it made me shiver. It seemed as if he had read the innermost secrets of my heart; and I could quite believe what I had already heard: that the holy priest could see what was passing within me.

“Immediately after dinner I hastened to join my two acquaintances. We amused ourselves at the expense of the Curé of Ars. While our merriment was at its height he passed us quite close. We uncovered at sight of him, like everyone else; he responded by a gracious bow and cast on us one of those wonderful looks which one cannot describe but which are never forgotten.

“My mother, who had never lost sight of me, now came to ask me to go to the church and try to speak to M. Vianney before leaving. This was the last thing I wanted to do; nevertheless—I don’t know why or how—I followed her to the church, went in as far as the choir and took my place in rear of some score of people who were in waiting. I did not dream of making my confession and I had not been there more than a few minutes before I was thinking how to make my escape. But what was my astonishment when I saw M. le Curé leave the sacristy and come straight to me! He signed to me to follow him. I obeyed without seeing where I was going, so agitated was I. He led me into the sacristy, shut the door, took his seat in his confessional and motioned me to kneel. My knees bent of themselves. I made the sign of the Cross and remained without speech or movement. The Curé of Ars made me a short and pathetic address; begged me to think of our Lord on the Cross, whose image was there before me; then he shed such abundance of tears as softened my heart. I no longer knew where I was or what was happening to me. Seeing that I was weeping, the holy

priest told me to go and say five *Paters* and *Aves* before the altar of St. Philomena. I went there. That was the hour and place of grace for me.

"Then something seemed to pass within me so extraordinary as to defy explanation. My heart beat with such violence that I was quite frightened. It seemed as if I were being severely beaten. How long this state lasted I know not; I lost the consciousness of my own existence. What I do know is that on coming to myself I was no longer the same. I was choked with tears and needed fresh air. When my comrades saw me they said: 'Aha! there is a change here! You look like a convert.' 'Possibly so,' replied I, shortly, and I left them abruptly. I wanted to be alone to weep in quiet.

"My mother, accepting the holy Curé's assurance that she could safely leave me to myself, took her departure, filled with consolation and hope. When I had finished my retreat M. Vianney would not give me absolution; but told me to come back in two months' time. The time seemed terribly long; I could not bear the idea of being at enmity with God. I returned to Ars at the end of six weeks and was well received—the good Father recognised me at once. When he had absolved me I asked him about my vocation. He reflected a moment, then he said without hesitation that a military career was unsuitable for me, and that God was calling me to a more perfect state, but I must wait six months longer.

"The idea of being a religious had never entered my head; nevertheless I accepted what M. le Curé had said as coming from heaven—that I should join a congregation devoted to education; and only thought of how to carry it out. I had the grace of not resisting grace, and it is now sixteen years since I began to experience the fulfilment of the divine promise of a hundred-fold to those who leave all things to follow Christ.

"During the six months I remained in the world after my conversion I had a good deal to endure. I became the butt for gross merriment and indecent raillery on the part of my former companions in wickedness. Whenever they met me in the street they would point at me with: 'There is the pious man! Look at the ass whose head's been turned by the Curé of Ars!' Once they tried to carry me off to the café; many a time have they endeavoured to make me miss Mass on a Sunday. But I always managed to hold out and they never succeeded . . .

"One thought—and a very practical one—made itself felt in the midst of my trials. I had learned the best part of the Gospel by heart before my First Communion; and one particular saying of our Lord came ever to my mind: 'Blessed are they who shall suffer persecution for my sake.' My practice was to have recourse to the Blessed Virgin, and she has never failed me. Let this

good Mother but continue to protect and bless me, and I shall be assured that neither this world nor the world below can separate me from the love of Jesus Christ !

The converted sinner,
P.M.B."

An unbelieving woman—alas ! there are such—one of the anomalies of this world. Incredulity in the heart of a woman is a wound caused by remorse—that weapon which the justice of God employs when He would strike without curing. In the present instance she was a lady of exalted rank, the victim of an early education that had developed nothing more than instinct. Later she became the victim of those corrupting practices and complacent maxims which deify all evil propensities and encourage every human weakness, ending by coming to blaspheme the truths which condemned her, the virtues of which she was deficient, the duties which she neglected and the glory of a good conscience which she had lost. She was attracted to Ars by curiosity or, more correctly, by the mercy of God—for it may well be doubted whether there was any merit on her part. On her arrival she sought an audience with the holy Curé. What passed between them no one knows. But it is well known that the man of God sometimes met these great ladies in a way that surprised them—and threw them into consternation. And so this haughty dame threw herself at his feet, like Magdalen at the feet of our Lord, and promised to do all he said. After a retreat at Ars she went—without any re-entry into high society—to become a religious and for sixteen years she devoted herself to the service of the poor. This conversion took place in 1840.

Husband an indifferentist, wife a Christian. Such are only too often the conditions of married life in our day. How much suffering does not lurk beneath the surface of such a contrast ! The man of whom we are about to speak was the most affectionate albeit the most blameworthy of husbands ; his wife the most devoted yet the most unhappy of women. For ten years did her prayers and tears ascend to heaven on his behalf. In her bitterness of spirit she would almost venture to reproach Almighty God for making her wait the grace she asked for so long a time. Sometimes she abandoned herself to a veritable inundation of tears and prayers. When she had thus relieved herself she felt more peaceful. Those ladies among our readers who have ever sought from God the conversion of a father, husband, son or brother can picture to themselves the anxiety of such a state better than we can describe it. In the present instance an unexpected event came to bring some small ray of hope to the wife. His business called M. N. to Lyons, and she accompanied him. Business done, she said to him, just as they were about to leave : " My dear,

if you have no objection we might pass through Ars on our way home. It will not take us long, and carriages go there from here. We could see this good Curé whom everyone talks about." The proposal was accepted; this was the opening grace from God.

On arriving at Ars Madame N. had an interview with M. Vianney. When she got back to the inn she said to her husband: "My dear, you ought to go and see M. le Curé. He is a most wonderful man—a saint of olden time. You will not be sorry for having made his acquaintance." There was no need to urge the point; divine grace was there, and for the second time he yielded to it without the least suspicion that he was doing so. On finding himself in the sacristy and face to face with the servant of God he offered him the civilities of a well-bred man and complimented him on his reputation. The good Curé blushed and received this homage with the timidity of a child that is quite unconscious of its own parts. They talked of indifferent matters; then the visitor prepared to take his leave, when M. Vianney detained him. "My friend, are you going already? You have surely something more to say to me." "Pardon me, Monsieur le Curé, but I have no more to say. I only came here to have the pleasure of paying my respects to you." The holy priest looked at him earnestly—one of those looks which had all the tenderness of a father combined with all the insight of a prophet—and pointed to the confessional, saying: "Kneel down there." "But, Monsieur le Curé, I did not come for confession; one of these days I may, but I am not disposed for it just now."

Nevertheless the man of God continued to look fixedly at him, and his look seemed to ask: "Why put it off, my child? I do not accept your refusal, and you will not leave until you are at peace with God." But he replied: "Monsieur le Curé, I cannot . . . I have not thought it over, and I must have time for reflection." And while he was saying: "I don't want to," he fell on his knees involuntarily and began his *Confiteor*. Next day there was a second interview, in which the penitent made his last struggles against grace. Hardly had he entered the confessional than he rose up, quitted the sacristy abruptly and crossed the choir without making any reverence to the high altar. His poor wife was kneeling in a corner of the church. On seeing her husband retire so precipitately she knew not whether to hope or fear; and much troubled, she followed him. "What is the matter? Are you ill?" "No," replied he, in a tone of exceeding bad humour, almost exasperation; "but we will get away at once."

Distracted by these words, Madame N. exerted herself to calm her husband, and several persons helped her. When he became quiet M. N. spoke no more of going away. Next day he consented to assist at the Mass of the holy Curé. No sooner had he seen him at the altar than his heart was changed; and he afterwards

betook himself to the sacristy spontaneously, to resume his interrupted confession. From that hour he was a changed man. He was to be seen for days, catechism in hand, in the Lady chapel, studying the truths of divine faith under the eyes of her who is the Refuge of sinners—truths to the consideration of which he had never given a quarter-of-an-hour's serious attention for many years. He completed his confession and made an edifying and fervent Communion. No need to describe the joy of his wife. To perpetuate the remembrance of so great a favour she had a little oratory built in her house, in which she placed a statue of our Lady. Every day they said their prayers there together. And when any friends came to visit them, M. N. never failed to take them to the domestic oratory to say an *Ave* for his own perseverance.

In 1842 an important personage came to Ars, attracted by the great reputation of the Curé. He was conducted to the sacristy, where M. Vianney was hearing confessions. We know not what passed in the soul of this visitor, but he literally threw himself on the neck of the holy priest and held him in a close embrace for some seconds. When the personage let go of him the Curé, who had shown neither surprise nor embarrassment, pointed to his prie-dieu and said : " Kneel down, my friend ; now I am going to hear your confession." The stranger had not a word to say. The sight of the servant of God, together with his words and gesture, changed his heart in an instant. This man, who had not made a confession for forty years, was so moved by the unction of the Curé of Ars that he made a retreat of some days under his direction, and did not leave until he had fulfilled all his duties.

In the course of the same year an old man accompanied his young niece to Ars, who wanted to consult M. Vianney on the choice of a state of life.

" My friend," said the Curé, on perceiving him, " have you come for confession ?"

" No, Monsieur," replied he, rather taken aback by such a direct attack ; " I have no such intention. I came to escort my niece. When she has received your advice I propose to go back home."

" My friend, we ought to take advantage of the opportunity ; perhaps it will not present itself again. I am old and you are no longer young. During our lives we have both seen many people die. There are those who reject mercy and whom mercy in its turn rejects. Come, my friend, don't wait for time, for time will not wait for us."

" Monsieur le Curé, that is all very fine ; but my confession will not be an affair of a day. I should have to remain here some little time, and that would cost money."

At this the servant of God saw at once the sort of person with

whom he had to deal. He smiled gently and said : " My friend, don't let that disturb you ; when you have spent all your money you can apply to me."

The old man felt a trifle hurt. " Monsieur le Curé, thanks be to God, I have quite sufficient and have no need of alms." So saying, he plunged his hand into his pocket and drew forth sundry gold pieces.

" My friend," retorted the good Curé, gravely, " have no hesitation about spending this money for the salvation of your soul ; it is the best use to which you can put it. Our Lord has said : ' What shall a man give in exchange for his soul ? ' Hasten then to put your conscience in order. Remain here as long as may be necessary to do that well . . . make your confession as soon as may be."

This very pointed exhortation had an immediate effect.

In May, 1856, we witnessed the sudden conversion of an old man of eighty. He was a model of impiety and did nothing but blaspheme. The very mention of God or the Curé of Ars roused him to fury. He used to call M. Vianney an *old sorcerer*, an *aged hypocrite*. The good Father, who had been told of all this, had the charity to go to see this hardened old sinner at his hotel ; for it was impossible to get him to church. He went up to his room, threw himself on his knees before him, and with tears entreated : " Save your poor soul ! save your poor soul ! " The old man was so moved that he wept in his turn and began to recite the *Ave Maria*, continuing to do so almost incessantly while he remained at Ars. M. le Curé paid him a visit night and morning to hear his confession. A good and fervent Communion sealed the return to God of this poor workman of the eleventh hour.

Sylvain-Louis-François Dutheil, born at Clermont (Hérault), had been a soldier since he was sixteen. As a result of his excesses he had contracted consumption and other diseases, which put him in such danger that he was compelled to return to his home. Passing through the streets of Montpellier one day he noticed a portrait of the Curé of Ars in a shop-window, and thought fit to scoff at it. His sister who was with him said : " You are very wrong ; if you had confidence in the holy man you might perhaps obtain your cure." The soldier laughed at this and commenced his pleasantries afresh. That night he had a strange dream. The Curé of Ars appeared to him, holding an apple in his hand, which he presented to him with a smile. This apple began to decay, leaving, however, some parts sound.

Our young consumptive was immensely struck with this dream, and remarked to his mother : " This old Curé is not so terrible as I thought ; I will go and see him." The poor woman wished for nothing better. She went with him to Ars, and they put up at the Hôtel Pertinant. Every day M. Vianney visited

the sick man, whose condition was becoming worse. On the Saturday morning he was taken to the church, and after having received Holy Communion on the steps of the altar was carried into the sacristy to be near the stove. Then he exclaimed: "How happy am I! I have never felt anything like it before." Carried back to the hotel, he threw himself into the arms of his mother: "The joy of this Communion has made me forget all my sufferings," said he, with tears. "I will never leave the holy man; I would die here." The following night he gave up his soul to God.

Next day—Sunday, 6th December, 1855—M. le Curé alluded to the young man's death in his catechism—"Poor boy, he is happy now! It was only fair. He had said a good deal of evil about me; I owed it to him to look after him. Oh! how happy he is! . . . It is not sufficient, my children, to begin well; we must also end well." On another occasion the servant of God again recalled the circumstance. "Even my *carnaval* does good sometimes. The good God makes use of anything." (*Carnaval* was a term he was accustomed to apply to his portrait).

Nevertheless M. Vianney had been sad, and none knew the reason of his trouble. Somebody having asked him, he replied: "I have just seen myself as one carried to the gates of hell. Oh! it is terrible! . . ." It was thought that he had offered to make reparation for the young man who was about to die. What seems to support the idea is the heavenly consolation which came to him some days later.

On another occasion the servant of God was visited in his sacristy by an individual whose language, bearing and manners plainly denoted their possessor to be a man of the very best society—for the great ones of earth were allured by the odour of sanctity in which he lived. The unknown entered respectfully, and M. Vianney, thinking he had come for confession, indicated with his hand the little prie-dieu at which penitents usually knelt.

"Monsieur le Curé," began he of the polished manner, who perfectly understood the gesture, "I have not come to confess by any means; but to reason with you."

"Oh! my friend, you have come to the wrong place for that; I am no good at reasoning . . . but if you have need of consolation kneel down there," (this with a motion towards the prie-dieu again), "and believe me that many others have knelt there and have not repented them of it."

"But, Monsieur le Curé, I have already had the honour of telling you that I did not come here for confession, and that for a very simple reason; I have no faith. I believe no more in confession than I do in anything else."

"You have no faith, my friend? Oh! how I pity you! You are living in a fog . . . A child of eight knows more than you do from its catechism. I thought I was ignorant enough, but you

are still more ignorant, because you lack the knowledge of the elementary things you ought to know . . . You have no faith? Very well then! that is reason sufficient for me to trouble you, which otherwise I should not have ventured to do; but it is for your own good. Kneel down there, and I will hear your confession. When you have made your confession you will believe."

"But, Monsieur le Curé, you are asking me to play a comedy with you!"

"Kneel down there, I tell you!"

The sweetness and the tone of authority tempered by grace with which the words were accompanied caused the man to fall on his knees without intending it and almost in spite of himself. He made the sign of the Cross—a thing he had not done for years—and commenced the humble avowal of his faults. He rose from his knees not only consoled but perfectly believing—having experienced in his own case the fact that the shortest and surest road to faith is the performance of works, according to the eternal word of the Master of mankind, a word too little understood "He that doth truth, cometh to the light." (John iii., 21).

On leaving the little sacristy where he had found the peace of mind so vainly sought elsewhere the unbeliever of an hour ago could not conceal his satisfaction. "What a man!" said he; "what a man is here! Nobody ever spoke to me as he did. If he had not taken me in hand in that fashion it would have been years and to spare before I had made my confession." Some time later when M. Vianney passed from the church to the presbytery his happy penitent was observed to throw himself on his knees and with tears ask his blessing.

We find in the life of Père de Ravignan, that the illustrious Jesuit—the man whom Gregory XVI. called the Apostle of Paris—used the same method to bring back to the faith those who averred themselves to be tormented by doubt. After the Conferences of 1841 he wrote to the General of the Society:—"A considerable number came to raise difficulties, and I said to them: 'There is a way out, believe me; kneel down there.'" And he added that with one single exception all made their confession.

Pascal had abundant justification for quoting the words of a Saint: *Kneel down, take holy water, recite the rosary*: that is to say: Abase your pride of heart, make an act of humility; by a heroic effort assume that lowliness that pleases the divine mercy and infallibly draws down grace. We believe that it is the great means, and that there is none other besides. If only those men who say they have no faith and yet desire it would take holy water devoutly, say their rosary, or frequent the church and confessional—in a word, if they would only kneel with us they would hardly have made the sign of the Cross or smitten their breast, than they would believe, love and hope as we do.

There are up and down the world many honest men who would like to believe and say they envy the happiness of those who do believe. If these people really understood their own misery ; if they felt the absolute necessity they have of God they would turn towards Him ; this new orientation of their soul would produce an attraction ; this attraction would lead to a desire ; and God hears and answers every desire that has Himself for its object. But rarely do they go so far ; these pretended desires often lack sincerity. When there is a real hunger and thirst after justice it is soon satisfied.

The Curé of Ars was not alone in effecting conversions. The influence of his sanctity, the sovereign efficacy of his prayers, made themselves felt round about him ; and all whom he associated with his ministry participated in his powers in some degree. There is no one of the missionaries called to assist the venerable apostle in his labours and deal with the overflow of the multitude who has not felt this very frequently.

In 1856, I (M. Monnin) preached the month of May at Ars. I observed a young man of good appearance, about twenty-five years of age, prowling about my confessional in the chapel of the Holy Angels with an air of disquiet. Then he entered timidly and made his confession. Of what passed I can of course say nothing ; but I can say that it has rarely been given me to assist at a piece of work more prompt, decisive and miraculous than that which passed under my eyes in that soul.

Why then was this young man there, overwhelmed with compunction ? What was it that had brought him to Ars ? Some days previously he had been present at a discussion on miracles among his fellow-students, in which the question was treated with as much seriousness as was likely in such an assembly. By a strange piece of good fortune there happened to be a more enlightened man there ; and he had the courage to take up a brief on behalf of the miraculous. After an eloquent speech for the defence this counsel for Almighty God concluded : " For the rest, gentlemen, if you would care to see miracles and happen to have a few twenty-franc pieces to spare, take train to Lyons ; then go to a little village on the banks of the Saône which nobody ever heard of twenty years ago and to which some fifty thousand people now betake themselves every year, and you will see miracles." " Why shouldn't I go ?" reflected our young man ; " certainly the thing is worth the trouble."

So he came, but without the least suspicion that he himself was to be the miracle he was to see at Ars. And my colleagues can relate many similar incidents.

These scenes occurred every day and all day. One curé told us that he had in his parish ten men who had been converted by the servant of God. Another assured us that it was easy to see

who among his flock had made the pilgrimage to Ars, which pilgrimage was, he added, beyond all doubt of the greatest possible benefit to the country.

We do not know of anyone who approached M. Vianney and yet contrived to elude the invisible net with which the divine Master armed His disciples when He sent them through the world to be fishers of men, and which our humble apostle cast around him with so much skill and success.

It was the greatest sinners who attracted his zeal and solicitude in an especial degree. The more a soul was sunk in vice the more lively and tender was his pity; and the more he endeavoured by force of patience, gentleness and charity to wrest it from the grip of Satan, to place it in the arms of Jesus Christ, the great Friend of sinners. He well understood that in time of distress the innocent have two great resources—God and their conscience—and these never fail them. On the other hand, the guilty has neither of them; he dares not lift his eyes to the God whom he has offended; nor does he dare to look inwards on himself, where is nothing but remorse. One asylum only remains for him therefore, and that asylum is the compassion of the priest.

The tears of the good Father fell on the wounds of conscience like the oil of the Samaritan. At the same time as he probed these wounds he healed them. Were they of recent date or were they the horrible ravages of deep and long-standing corruption, he healed them with the same facility. Conversions effected at Ars had this peculiarity, they were solid and durable. Reprobates given up to passions commonly adjudged to be incurable, such as intemperance and immorality, unfortunates sunk in brutishness to the last degree, yielded suddenly to the grace which acted through him.

We know a drunkard of sixty years standing who never yielded to his craving after his visit to Ars. The Vicaire of his parish told the missionaries that he was one of the most fervent of his penitents. He went to Communion every month; every Sunday he came to church with his wife, being careful to take a roundabout way home, so as not to pass the cabarets he used to frequent nor meet with the companions with whom he erstwhile forgathered.

Those who had never seriously considered spiritual things as well as those whom the false maxims of the world rendered incapable of appreciating the worth of the Curé of Ars, found a charm in the suave authority of his words that caused them to enter into themselves and invited them to a better life. The human soul has ever within itself, despite all error and perversity, the germs of truth and virtue, so that when good is presented to a man he can (if only he will) recognise and acclaim it by an intuition as sudden as that which led the beloved Disciple to recog-

nise Jesus on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias with the words : " It is the Lord."

That which is good leads to good ; it elevates and purifies. Many felt the necessity of purity of conscience in approaching the servant of God, and of so preserving it after they had seen and heard him. The wonderful spectacle of sanctity presented by the Curé of Ars remained with those who had seen it and protected them against all evil thoughts and every base or shameful desire. The conscience thus rendered delicate became fearful of evil and more accessible to good influences. Everyone felt captivated in his vicinity, nor would they leave it willingly. Some mysterious force attracted soul and body ; and no sooner had they departed than they commenced to dream of the time when they would be able to return. It was much easier to live altogether without having known this good and amiable Saint than to resign oneself to the idea of never seeing him again when once one had known him.

Some there were for whom the radiance of his virtue was a reproach. Involuntarily they compared their own life with the example they had before them, and their deficiencies were brought into prominence by the contrast ; hence disquiet and soul-sad-denying embarrassment. And admiration was not a sentiment they would permit themselves ; for in their heart of hearts they realised that the difference was too great and not by any means to their own advantage.

The Curé of Ars loved to quote the words of a poor sinner who said to him, amid the most demonstrative transports of joy : " Father ! Father ! how happy am I ! I would not have omitted to make my confession for a thousand francs ! . . . Till now I had a void here " (pointing to his heart) ; " you have filled this void ; it is there no longer. Nothing is wanting to me. All is full . . . " Wherefore : I SAY TO YOU, THAT EVEN SO THERE SHALL BE JOY IN HEAVEN UPON ONE SINNER THAT DOTHS PENANCE.

CHAPTER XXXII

OF THE WONDERFUL POWER OF CONSOLATION WITH WHICH OUR LORD HAD ENDOWED M. VIANNEY

Be not wanting in comforting them that weep, and walk with them that mourn. (Ecclus. vii., 38.)

From the mouth of a prudent man floweth honey. The sweetness of honey is under his tongue, and his lips are the comb that dischargeth it. (Rom. Brev.)

IN addition to the sick and sinners many of those who were sorrowful or afflicted presented themselves to M. Vianney in search of consolation. This unhappy world is nought but one vast Calvary for the most part! and a refuge for its victims must needs be provided at intervals along the highway of life.

All sorts and conditions of men assembled by day and night within the precincts of the little church at Ars; but no class was more in evidence than they that mourn and lament. Wealth and poverty, strength and weakness, elbowed one another incessantly; and sometimes met to their mutual advantage—for some brought with them what others came to seek.

Nothing was more striking than this re-union of rank and class, this contrast of the most diverse situations all converging on one point: universal equality in presence of suffering. All had suffered in their journey through life; all had been wounded in the strife; all had something whereof to complain; all were received with the same sympathetic affability—in which, if there were any partiality discernible, it was in favour of the insignificant, the poor, the disinherited, the over-worked and those who had to support the greatest misery or trials.

Family sorrows, reverses of fortune, sudden disasters, discordant households, compromised reputations, frustrated ambitions, affections betrayed, hearts disillusioned, unquiet desires, vain regrets, weakness oppressed, innocence persecuted, broken lives—every sort of misfortune found a place in the crowd that surrounded M. Vianney and filled his little church. What confidences have those walls overheard! what floods of tears have they witnessed! The Curé of Ars often heard things that went straight to his heart. He would pause, join his hands, raise eyes wet with tears to heaven in fervent supplication; then he would turn them on the unhappy one at his side, who felt the beginnings of hope and consolation in the profound sympathy of that look, charged with divine promise and heavenly benediction. There

was in it an inexhaustible supply whence each and everyone could draw according to his soul's need : the youth strength against his besetting sin ; the young girl the last word concerning her vocation : the mother of a family the secret of devotedness, advice on difficult situations and consolation for the evil day ; the man of riper years pardon for the errors of his youth ; for the aged the grace to end well. Here disquietude left its anxieties, vice laid down its shame and defilement, feebleness abandoned its feelings of discouragement, and despair renounced its project of suicide. All went out from his presence more serene in mind, with a brighter and more peaceful outlook on the future, and courage reinforced to support the troubles of the present.

The power of consolation of the servant of God was immense. He had but to speak and his word went directly to the root of the evil. He bound up the wound, assuaged the pain ; he softened the poignancy of sorrow and the bitterness of anger and resentment—and all without pomposity, self-assertion or any of those adjuncts that enforce the words of a counsellor and impress, persuade, or gain the heart of a hearer. He sought nothing for and said nothing of himself. It was God who spoke through him and rendered his word efficacious.

A young mother could not resign herself to leave behind her on earth her five little children—orphans. The Curé of Ars went to see the dying woman. When he had spoken to her not only was she disposed to wish all that God willed, but she offered the willing sacrifice of her life ; she desired death and asked for it in her prayers, “ happy to leave the future of my children to the wisdom and providence of the One Being who is perfect in all His works.”

We knew a woman who had lost her only son. Her grief was as that of Rachel. M. Vianney knew how to calm this inconsolable maternal sorrow by words that appeared to come from heaven itself.

Madame de C. left seven little children behind her when she died. Their sorrowing father brought his motherless family to Ars. The holy Curé had known the young Comtesse de C. and had directed her, so that none was better able to speak of that angelic life, the loss of which had left such a void on earth, than he. He showed the father and his children how near to God was she whom they had lost. He raised their thoughts—which were centred on the grave—and without violently tearing them away from where they naturally would be, turned them to the consideration of heaven. This family departed perfectly consoled.

In like manner did he console a saintly soul—whom many of our French readers have known—after the terrible death of her father. He succeeded in calming the inexpressible disquietude that had been caused by an end so sudden and unforeseen.

He rendered the same service to Père Hermann,* who could find no relief elsewhere after the supreme trial of his life—the death of his mother in the darkness of Judaism.

One of our friends came to Ars after a recent bereavement. His brother had died in want in New Orleans. This man had not met the gratitude which was due to him. There was some reason to suppose that the remembrance of injuries received might have sufficed to trouble the peace of his last moments. Our friend needed consolation, albeit his sorrow was not as the sorrow of those who have no hope. He appealed to M. Vianney, who said to him: "To-morrow, after Mass, I will answer—perhaps." And the next day: "My friend, we must pray! Your brother has great need of it." "Then, Father, my brother is saved!" "Yes, but let us pray earnestly. He is suffering . . . he will be delivered."

One day two women in mourning met at Ars—two mothers who had both buried all their hopes in this world. They had never seen one another before, but companions in misfortune recognise those similarly situated. At the first glance these two understood, made friends, embraced and wept together. Thus before going to see the holy Curé they had mutually found, if not alleviation, at least some mitigation of their sorrow. One of them was a true Christian; her life was spent in the assiduous practice of virtue, in prayer and good works. The sorrows which fell upon her one after another with strange persistency found her, so to speak, kneeling before the altar. Her three sons died, and to the loneliness of her life together with her intense grief was added the dismay of an entire family whose name threatened to become extinct. The other victim of misfortune was one of those frivolous beings who allow the faith received in baptism to lie dormant, even though a Christian education may conserve it in their heart for a time. She ran after pleasure and in the midst of the smiles and honours of the world had lost her only son. The latter was the first to interview the good Curé,

The servant of God heard her sighs and sighed himself. He wept, spoke tenderly and sympathetically; then, telling her to kneel, he knelt himself and prayed with her. No father could have treated his daughter in a more affectionate manner. On the other hand, confronted with the Christian mother, he was the wise director, but nevertheless firm and austere. While not finding fault with her tears he cautioned her against exaggerated sorrow, and as she had the assurance of the salvation of those she mourned he rephended the earthly and selfish natural affection that could lead her to regard the eternal well-being of her children with regret. He lifted this poor soul—quite astonished and upset

*"Père Hermann" was Hermann Cohen, a famous pianist, who, after his conversion became a Carmelite. He founded several houses of his Order, among which were Lyons in 1857 and London in 1862.

for the moment—into the region of faith, offering her the invigorating bitterness of the Cross, just as he had fed her companion with the milk and honey meet for babes.

We reproduce a few letters in which afflicted souls render their homage to the consoling power they had found at Ars. They are taken quite at random. Missives of this description can be reckoned by thousands :—

“ For long years,” wrote one, “ I have been grieving over the condition of my poor sister, and the moment of my receipt of your precious and consoling reply was the only occasion on which I have been encouraged to hope.

“ May M. le Curé be blessed for his charity and compassion ! Alas ! I have found it nowhere else ; on the contrary, when I sought some little support and encouragement for my sister she was severely criticised and condemned, nor was it understood that her state is quite involuntary and that man can do nothing . . . Ah ! it was only the prayers of a saint that could bring any comfort to this dear soul.”

“ The words of the venerable Curé,” said another “ and his prayers were as the dew of heaven to me. I do not try to thank you for them. You will understand me. You have sent me a balm for all my anguish and anxiety. To-morrow I shall begin the novena in which our hearts will be united, and with good will ; I will follow the advice of the holy Curé. In these days of overwhelming disquiet his prayers and the remembrance of his words will calm me. May you be blessed for the consolation your letter has brought me at a time when I had such pressing need of it ! The saying of the Curé of Ars : *See God in everything and rejoice in all that God wills*, is an inexhaustible subject for meditation ; I trust the good God will give me grace to profit by it.

“ Besides which, the thought that such a saintly man will pray for me arms me with renewed courage. The good God strikes hard at our family, but with a mercy that is very evident. In reminding him of his promise I place myself respectfully at the feet of the holy Curé.”

✓ The following lines were addressed to us a few days after the death of the servant of God :—

“ I beg our Lord to allow me to return to Ars again. I should like to breathe that pure air once more . . . While the dear *Saint* lived nothing frightened me ; I was assured of finding counsel and strength in him. Three or four times a year I used to go to acquire renewed vigour at that living source and thence draw courage to journey through life and overcome the difficulties that meet one at every step more easily. For one never left him without a feeling of strength and hope in the heart. To-day I feel like a dismasted ship . . .

“ Who can describe the void that the loss of such a man will make in the world ? . . . ”

CHAPTER XXXIII

HOW THE PRAYERS OF M. VIANNEY WERE HEARD BY GOD

The prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds : and till it come nigh he will not be comforted ; and he will not depart until the most High behold. And the Lord will not be slack . . . (Ecclus. xxxv., 21.)

The Lord heard His Saint who called upon Him. (Rom. Brev., Com. Conf.)

EVERYONE who went to Ars did not necessarily make his confession there, nor did all bring doubts or difficulties to be solved by the servant of God and draw light and strength from his wise counsels. But all wished to be commended to him ; all desired to have a share in his suffrages ; and all understood that his real power lay in prayer. Those who saw him the most frequently and were nearest to him were convinced that our Lord would refuse him nothing and that to obtain any grace whatsoever M. Vianney had only to ask for it. This confidence was born naturally, did one only hear him recite the Lord's Prayer—that petition which includes everything, from the sanctification of the Holy Name down to the humble request for daily bread. One felt what an immense force of impetration was there.

"To restore the use of my eyes," said a young man who was blind, "nothing more would be needed than for M. le Curé merely to say : 'I will.'" Many sick, infirm and afflicted used to say the same. We love to quote what a peasant said of the Curé of Ars : "It is not astonishing that he works miracles. He is a servant of God. God obeys His servants."

Facts are not wanting in support of this opinion. We will adduce a few of them. It is remembered at Ars that when a house in the hamlet of Gardes collapsed a woman and her grandchild were buried in the ruins. The young mother escaped, but she was beside herself with grief. She ran about the village crying : "The child ! the child is killed !" and wanted to put an end to herself. Her husband, when he first saw her, thought she had gone out of her mind and that in a moment of frenzy she had murdered her little one. They went in all haste to tell M. le Curé. On receipt of the news he fell on his knees and said a prayer ; then he repaired to the scene of the disaster. Arrived at the ruins, he blessed them. There was no great difficulty in rescuing the grandmother, who had suffered nothing worse than slight contusions ; but the child could not be found, nor could its cries be heard. M. Vianney prayed with an air of compassion, and meanwhile encouraged the searchers, inspiring all with hope.

At length they discovered the baby, who began to smile at

once more seeing the light of day, and evidently wanted to be taken to its mother's breast. Nor had she received the slightest injury.

A native of Ars named Givre fell from a tall poplar head first at the moment when M. le Curé was passing. The servant of God at once gave his benediction. The fall of the man was arrested and his accident did him no harm.

By the efficacy of his prayers M. Vianney cured, converted and consoled, even at a distance.

A person at Ars received a letter in which he was asked to interest the holy Curé in favour of a young man who had long been ill. The commission was carried out, and M. le Curé replied : " I will bear him in mind." Some time afterwards another letter arrived : " You seem to have forgotten our poor patient. Surely if the Saint of Ars had spoken to the good God concerning him he would have felt the effects of it." Whereupon ensued a fresh appeal to M. Vianney, who again replied : " I will bear him in mind." The sick man grew worse. A third letter came, in which reproaches were not spared, and the recipient was given to understand that if the grace asked for was not forthcoming the young man was lost for all eternity.

Much concerned at reading this, and horrified at the possible results of any neglect, the correspondent hurried once more to M. le Curé. " Father, this is the third time I have been here to ask you to pray to God on behalf of a poor sick man worthy of your compassion ; you ought to have borne him in mind, because you promised me to do so ; and nevertheless the sickness is as bad as ever. I conjure you to tell me why God refuses to take pity on this poor young man."

" The good God cannot keep His patience any longer. He does not wish the young man to perish everlastingly ; and has sent this illness to check him in his evil way." " Father, will you please ask God to cure him this once ; he will be most grateful and will lead a better life." " No, he will not be grateful ; on the contrary, he only wants to be cured so that he may be able to continue to offend God. At the present moment he is murmuring and blaspheming." " Shall I tell him what you say, Father ?" " No ; that will only serve to irritate him." " Well then, since that is so, ask God to increase his sufferings, to try him longer, until he is converted, but at the same time to give him the graces of patience and resignation—to make him understand why he suffers ; and when he shall have been purified to receive him into heaven." " I will bear him in mind, I promise you."

Some time later the charitable individual who had written in the name of the young invalid came to Ars. The only reply she had received to her last letter was the advice to make a novena to St. Philomena. " How is your young friend ?" they asked

her. "Oh!" replied she, "my young friend is worse than ever; and he is asking God to make him suffer still more. He is an angel of patience. Those who knew what he was before cannot contain their astonishment when they see what he is now."

The prayers of the Curé of Ars had obtained a grace of much more value than health for this young man—the grace to make a good use of suffering.

In 1845 a Carmelite nun of the monastery of the Saint-Esprit, at Amiens—in which the austerity of life bears some resemblance to that of the servant of God—fell dangerously ill. Two physicians whose knowledge and experience caused them to be regarded as oracles declared that there was no hope of recovery for her; there was nothing they could do for a little body so frail and debilitated. The patient was commended to the prayers of M. Vianney. In a few days her recovery was so perfect that in order to correspond with the grace received it was thought that she ought to be permitted to resume her austerities—in which she still (1861) perseveres.

In February, 1857, while we were preaching the Lent at Ars we received these lines from a mother:—

"I am in a state of great affliction and disquiet. My little Joseph is sick. This child—so healthy up to now—is a prey to a violent fever, which has not left him for four days. The idea came to me of commending him to the prayers of the holy man whom you have the happiness of contemplating continually, and I am relying on you to interest him very specially in this matter.

"Overwhelmed with work, my husband is away just now; but knowing his regard for you I have no hesitation in saying everything that is kind to you on his behalf. It is for the sake of the friendship you have so often shown for him that I entreat you to obtain the prayers of the holy Curé for our dear child and also to add your own.

"I feel that neither my husband nor myself would have the fortitude to bear such a trial as I can only think of with terror."

The following in postscript:—

"My wife's letter was too late to catch the post yesterday . . . Another night has passed with no change in the condition of our beloved little patient. Evidently we are in presence of a continued fever of the gravest character. May the all-powerful Physician abate its virulence and preserve this child to us, on whom all our affections are concentrated! I offered him to God when he came into the world; and God knows that I desire to make him an instrument for His kingdom and His glory! . . . I ask his preservation solely for this reason—no other would redound to the honour of his parents. Pray, then! pray! ask the holy Curé to pray; obtain for us the preservation of our child or resig-

nation to bear his loss. Ah ! how difficult it will be, unless God gives us grace !

“ Of your charity, write a line to encourage us ! ”

This letter we read to M. le Curé, who shed tears as he listened and promised a Mass for the following day. He also enjoined us to write to the parents to tell them to have confidence, and gave us a medal of St. Philomena to send to them. Next day was a Monday and we reminded him of his promise. “ Ah ! my friend,” replied he, “ I am obliged to pray for this gentleman to-day—but to-morrow will be soon enough.” “ This gentleman,” we were told, was a bishop, who, to maintain his incognito, had come to Ars in ordinary dress.

On Wednesday we received the following news :—

“ I write immediately to tell you—you, the intermediary of this wonderful grace—of the cure of my little Joseph. I say *cure*, not convalescence, because the transition was so abrupt, so sudden. On Tuesday morning the child's condition was alarming, and about eight o'clock—the precise hour at which the Curé of Ars celebrated Mass—I saw him, so to speak, transformed. Monday had been very trying. He did not seem to suffer much, but was restless on waking and the fever was intense.

“ I call that by the name I believe it ought to be called—a *miracle* ; or a grace accorded in such a manner and under such circumstances that it is impossible not to recognise the intervention of the supernatural. Certainly one has no need to be a physician to understand how remarkable this cure is.

“ Be so kind as to tell M. le Curé—that holy and venerable priest—that God has heard him and my child is saved. I venture to use that word though we are only at the day following the transformation. May he continue to pray for the soul as he has prayed for the body. Indeed ! I would ask him to pray for the body in view of the soul ; not that my little Joseph will ever have a more beautiful soul than he has now, but that he may have a great soul and one devoted to the salvation of others and the glory of God. A thousand thanks to God ! and a thousand blessings on His great servant and faithful friend.”

“ In the winter of 1850—the time when I left my own part of the country to come to Ars—I had a fall on the ice that only just missed killing me. I said not a word about it to M. le Curé for four months. I managed to work a little during the day-time, but suffered much at night ; I had hardly a minute's rest. When very much oppressed by pain and anxiety I used to rise and walk about to obtain a little relief. During these wakeful hours the thought of M. Vianney came often to my mind. I reflected on his laborious life, his knowledge of the heart, his love of souls, and I said to myself : ‘ Verily there is in the Curé of Ars a hidden God who sustains and enlightens him.’ ”

"One night I went to confession, so as to be free during the day. It was then two o'clock. The holy Curé seeing me among the other penitents in waiting approached and said: 'My child, why do you rise so early—you who suffer so much?' He made the same observation in the confessional. Now, I had never spoken to him about my trouble. Emboldened by his kindness, I dared to reply: 'Why do I get up so early? And you, Father, don't you get up earlier still? How can you be so charitable towards others and so hard to yourself? As for me, I get up because I suffer less when I am not in bed. But you, Father, you rise for the help of all who ask your services.' After that he made no more remonstrance.

"I waited until the summer without speaking to him about my health; I was ashamed to ask my own cure from a man who was always suffering himself. But necessity knows no law. At harvest-time I sought M. Vianney in his confessional and said: 'Father, I want to go gleaning, but I cannot.' 'My child,' he replied, 'you should consult a doctor in Lyons. He will very soon find out what is the matter with you, and give you the necessary remedies.'

"'Father I have already consulted doctors and often; you are sending me to Lyons to get cured, while the sick at Lyons come to be cured at Ars. I will not go to Lyons, because he who ought to cure me is here. I do not ask a complete cure, but only sufficient to gain my living.'

"'Well! my child, I will bear you in mind.'

"At the end of eight days I went out to glean without feeling any fatigue other than that produced by hard work.

"Some years since I went to pay a visit to Jeannette Dumas, the wife of one Charmette, of the parish of Valsonne. On my arrival I saw one of her children, who looked like one risen from the dead; he dragged himself along the ground on his hands and knees. I was seized with pity for the poor thing, whose wretched condition contrasted so sadly with the rude health of his brothers. 'An illness left him like that,' said the mother to me. 'Touch his legs and you will see there is no bone in them. You can bend them anyhow and he will not utter a sound.' 'I took the little fellow's legs and felt them. They could be twisted like a towel without hurting the child; there was nothing but cartilage there.

"'You would have done well, Madamé,' said I, 'to come to Ars, and ask the cure of your child there.'

"'So I did,' answered the mother, 'and the good Curé told me to make a novena to St. Philomena. He assured me that my little cripple would be better afterwards. But I made the novena badly and nothing happened. Ah! I should be most grateful if somebody would ask the Saint of Ars to help me!'

"On my return I presented myself to M. le Curé. 'Father,

while I was away I fell in with a poor little child for whom the help of your prayers had been asked.'

" 'My child,' replied he, at once, 'the child would certainly have been cured; but they did not make the novena as it should have been made.'

" 'Father, these people are poor; but they are good folks. They prayed badly because they were weighed down with work. Cure this child, please! You have no need of his parents' prayers for that.'

" 'I will bear it in mind, child.'

" Three months later the little boy was able to walk with sticks. Soon afterwards I saw him quite well and strong."

A woman whose irregularities were the sorrow and shame of her family was recommended to the prayers of M. Vianney. Hardly had this been done than remorse took possession of her and left her not an instant's repose. Her despair led her to Ars, where she recovered peace of mind after a good confession. She declared that she had had an intuition that someone had spoken to the holy Curé about her and that he was praying for her return to virtue. "I betook myself to the Curé of Ars," she added, "thinking he was accountable for the horrible torments I endured. Sometimes I was consumed with rage against him. It seemed to me that if I had hold of him I could have crushed him."

We could give the names of numbers of curés who attested that since they came to Ars to commend their parishes to the prayers of the servant of God they were no longer recognisable and offered the happiest contrast to those of the neighbourhood.

Not a day passed without the receipt of letters expressive of the gratitude of those whom the prayers of the Curé of Ars had relieved, cured, consoled, or led back to God.

"Mon vénérable Père," wrote a noble lady, on the point of leaving Ars, where she had just obtained her cure, "I have no hope of seeing you again before my departure; that is a deprivation I offer to our divine Saviour; but I cannot go without expressing my gratitude to you. You demanded faith, Father, and you found it—if I am not deceiving myself. Yes, I believe your prayers brought me health from heaven. I understood it, but wanted to hear you affirm it . . .

"I shall never forget that moment, nor that other one when you told me that the good God loved me. I will try to preserve that love and make it the only one to fill my heart on earth.

"I ask your pardon for having told my family that I am cured! It will distress your humility, I know! . . . It is a great disappointment for me not to receive your benediction once more, but I now commend myself to your prayers. May our beloved Jesus bless all my works! I beseech you not to forget me at the hour of my death, so that it may be a holy one,

"I shall return during the year to pour out my gratitude at the feet of the good Master. I shall also send you my little boy, in order that you may bless him and sow in his heart the knowledge of things divine.

"Help me; be the guide to direct me on my passage through life.

"Adieu, mon Père, friend of my soul, which you have consoled and encouraged; friend of my family and children, to whom you have restored their mother. It was only for them that I desired my cure. For myself I should have preferred suffering if I had thought myself sufficiently perfect to support it well. You may have inspired that thought in me. God has decided otherwise. Glory be to Him.

"I entreat you to remember the poor parish of O. before God They have not the happiness of loving God there. Inspire me with the best manner of doing good in the place.

Your grateful daughter,

LOUISE DE M."

—From a convent in the middle of France :—

"A woman of forty-eight has had attacks of dementia; she thinks herself lost. Her husband wishes to know if this unhappy person must be taken to Ars or whether matters can be arranged in any other manner.

"The two individuals concerning whom we wrote last are cured—one of a skin disease the other of lunacy. Glory be to God! Gratitude to the good pastor!"

A letter from the superioress of a convent in Dublin lies before us. In this the reverend mother excuses herself for the delay in announcing the sudden cure of a young person who was completely deaf. The conclusion is to this effect: "I cannot describe to you the intense veneration of our city towards the holy Curé."

The superioress of a convent in the diocese of Nîmes wrote :—

"It is with heartfelt satisfaction that I tell you that St. Philomena has heard the prayers of your venerable Curé and that our dear invalid is now fully convalescent. Another word from him to the good Saint and all our fears will be at an end."

The Rev. Fr. Deschamps, Superior of the Redemptorists, wrote to the missionary at Ars :—

"On my return here I related all I had seen and heard at Ars. You will be in no way surprised at the enclosed letter. It is from a fervent religious who might do much good by his talents if it would only please God to give him his health.

"May I take this opportunity of recalling to the prayers of your venerable Curé the three Belgians whom he blessed and whose confessions he heard in September—the Redemptorist, the Belgian official his brother, and particularly the daughter of the

last-mentioned? She found what she went to Ars to seek—found it at Ars itself and earnestly asks M. Vianney to obtain for her grace to be faithful to the light she obtained.

“Brussels, 16th October, 1858.”

Mademoiselle Jaricot, of Lyons, wrote thus to the holy Curé:—

“Mon très honoré Père,

“Madame de la Bâtie had the honour to speak to you concerning a young person from Saint-Vallier who was seriously ill and commended to your prayers. Your charity caused you to advise a novena to St. Philomena in which you were to join. The novena was made eventually as an act of thanksgiving, the young person having been cured on the first day, which was the feast of our Lady of Compassion.

“She is going to Ars to thank you and receive your good counsel relative to her vocation, on which she has such firm convictions that she desires to submit them to your enlightenment.”

We quote again:—

“Permit me to inform you that since you prayed to St. Philomena in behalf of my child he has become much better. I trust she will complete the work. Be so good as to thank her for me.”

“Six years ago, mon très digne Père en Jésus-Christ, an ecclesiastic commended me to your holy prayers. It was at the beginning of my illness. You said it would be long; but you held out hope. And indeed after five years of severe suffering I suddenly rose from my bed; it was the day of the proclamation of the Dogma—8th December, 1854. I ask of your charity, digne Père, to assist me to discharge my debt of gratitude towards Mary Immaculate . . .”

“Gratitude makes it a duty to return thanks first to Almighty God, next to the venerated Curé of Ars. At the end of September, 1858, on the recommendation of the Bishop of Belley I entreated him on behalf of two of my sisters, one threatened with cataract, the other afflicted by a cyst; both of them very pious and quite resigned to the will of the good God. We made the novena for the two sisters at the same time. The second, who was not with us, was not immediately informed of our design, nor of the prayers that were being offered up for her intention. During the first days of the novena her sufferings increased so much that she remarked: ‘I am in such pain that I need prayers.’ That is just what had always happened when special prayers had been said for her intention. After the novena the pain diminished; she is now in her usual condition, which she bears with absolute resignation.

“As to Adèle, her sight is much improved. She is able to fulfil all her duties as mistress of a household—goes and comes as she pleases—an immense benefit already. Let us hope the remainder will come.”

“Your blessing and prayers have restored my dearest mother to peace and strength! . . . May you be blessed a thousand-fold before God! . . . Your holy medal has revived the life that was dying out, and we behold our beloved patient returning to health in the same measure as we persevere in prayer!”

“During the four years that your Saint has prayed for me I have felt myself in entirely different dispositions; I have recovered my satisfaction in prayer to God; I am better physically. I feel that if the servant of God would do me the favour of commencing a second novena in honour of the Heart of Mary I should be certain of my cure.”

“For several years I have wanted to go to see your venerable Curé. My wife’s foster-sister went to Ars suffering from violent nervous attacks, of which you saw a specimen in the church itself. She returned cured and has kept well for two years and a half.

“Permit me to approach you once again. I did so the first time in the spirit of the centurion in the Gospel; now I do so in that of the cleansed leper, to return thanks to God for having heard the prayers of His great servant. Be so good as to thank God once again, not only for having restored to health the poor sufferer who was the despair of her doctors but for preserving those who had the care of her from being attacked in the same way, as we had reason to fear. What gratitude do we not owe to God for preservation from such a misfortune!”

“Thank you for your good prayers and those of M. le Curé! Mathilde had a violent fever, which greatly alarmed us and the doctor as well. On the 8th—the day on which you mentioned her to M. Vianney—a great improvement took place; and next day—the day when the holy Curé said Mass for her—the fever completely left her. She is now quite convalescent.”

Madame la Comtesse de R. wrote to us at the opening of the year 1856:—

“My sister has been seriously ill for a long time; the holy Curé has promised her recovery for this year, and told my mother to prepare an ex-voto for St. Philomena. We propose to give a heart in silver-gilt and attach it to the hand of this gentle and well-beloved Saint.

“My brother and I would like to place a tribute to our gratitude in the chapel of our benefactress. We think of engraving the expression of this gratitude in gold letters on a slab of marble, and to perpetuate the memory of the event, we should like to add these words: WE ASKED A MIRACLE OF ST. PHILOMENA, AND ON . . . WE WERE HEARD. The only thing wanting is the exact date. Now, the holy Curé, who has told us that the cure will take place this year, must know for certain the day which God in

His mercy has appointed for the complete and definite deliverance of my poor mother and my angelic sister.

"Therefore will you who have the happiness of living on intimate terms with this holy friend of God ask him what date we should have engraved on the marble, in order to hand down both the testimony of our gratitude and this new proof of the power and goodness of St. Philomena to remotest posterity . . .

"In the ardour of a, perhaps, too presumptuous faith I had thought of being able to tell my mother to cause the date 10th August, 1856, the feast of St. Philomena, to be engraved, for I accept the word of the holy priest of God as that of God Himself, and I am sure our dear invalid will recover . . . If I am at fault in thus naming a time for God and St. Philomena I ask their pardon. But on reflection it appeared to me that it would be much better to have the date of her festival to whose merits and prayers we are under so great an obligation."

A few months later the Comtesse de R. returned to the charge :

"I entreat you to send me a less vague reply than that which you have had the goodness to transmit. I take it that in the spirit of humility your good Saint is unwilling to pronounce and would leave to God alone the dispensation of His mercies.

"I conjure you then to be our intermediary and obtain from him that, despite his humility, he will deign to give us in God's name this YES that we desire so greatly. O my God ! with what love and gratitude shall we not be penetrated for our Lord and His holy Church !

"Shall we commence a novena of thanksgiving ? I ask pardon, Monsieur, for these possibly indiscreet questions ; but I know that your Saint is well able to answer them. Why deny us the happiness of knowing ?

"I await your reply like a condemned criminal awaits that to his petition for mercy. Our petition could not be rejected by the King of kings ! By the manger of the Infant Jesus nothing but words of peace and love can be. I still hope then and I believe ! I persist in my belief !"

The wife of an officer of high rank in the army of Italy wrote, after Magenta :—

"As you have doubtless heard of the sanguinary battle that has recently taken place I am happy to inform you that, some hours later, I was reassured by telegraph of the safety of my husband . . . The message is in four words and affords no explanation. But that is no reason for not thanking the good God with all my heart and also those who have prayed for my dear husband. I had sent him the instructions of M. le Curé and he had replied that he would not omit one single day to say the *Ave Maria* agreed upon at his night prayers."

To ask is to receive when one asks what is really good. Some-one wrote to the servant of God :—

“ Monsieur le Curé,

“ Once again do I earnestly resort to the help of your holy prayers. During the course of last winter I had the honour to commend to you the reconciliation of a very divided household. Immediately you prayed the parties came together. Both my eldest son and I desire to go to express our gratitude to you in person ; but imperative duties keep me here. When it is possible I will go to thank you and bless Him who dispenses all good by your hand . . .

DE L., née DE B.”

“ You remember, Monsieur le Curé, receiving in the month of February a request for prayers in behalf of a Protestant family. Some days after we had the consolation of announcing to you the conversion of one of the members of that family. This example has just been followed by another. Therefore it becomes my duty to tell you of an outcome to which you have without doubt contributed much by your prayers.

“ This conversion has, as usually happens, hardened the rest of the family in a still more intolerant Protestantism, and the mother has left for England, taking with her her two daughters who no doubt would be disposed to imitate the example of their elders. The convert remains under the care of an aunt whose dispositions appear favourable.

“ We have experienced too much good, Monsieur le Curé, from your assistance not to ask you to continue to help us with your prayers to obtain the conversion of the remainder of this family.

“ You will learn with unbounded gratitude to God that the young person I commended to you and who had been seduced by the Protestant sect of *Momiers* has died in the Catholic faith, after having received the Sacraments of Penance, Extreme Unction and the holy Eucharist. Let us thank God and His most holy Mother for this result, truly marvellous in the eyes of those who know the prejudices with which her mind was filled. Besides this, the mother of this young person, in deeper error than her daughter, has now made her Easter duties. Let us ask that she may persevere.”

A curé wrote to the missionary at Ars from Franche-Comté :—

“ Monsieur et vénérable Confrère,

“ Only lately I asked the help of your good prayers for the deliverance of a person exposed to all the fury of hell . . . To-day I have the satisfaction of inviting you to praise, bless and thank the divine mercy for this happy deliverance which was obtained on Easter Monday.

"I should have to tell you of prodigies that have taken place every day for more than a year during the time of possession.

"I will confine myself to saying that for about six months the devils have been announcing the deliverance for Easter-tide. On the feast of the Seven Dolours our Lord had told the poor sufferer after Holy Communion that as she had willingly carried her cross after Him for so long He would give her as a sign of her deliverance the imprint of His own divine Cross.

"On the evening of Easter Sunday the devils shouted with rage that she would not be liberated that day, but next morning; and that the sign of their going forth would be the impression of the Cross on the left arm of their little victim. Next day, after Holy Communion, she was thrown down at the foot of the Lady altar; her rosary was broken to fragments; she rolled on the floor, uttering the most horrible shrieks . . . She was assisted to rise; I caused her to be taken to a room close to the church and there in the presence of three witnesses I commenced the exorcisms. She continued to roll on the ground, to howl and to shriek. Suddenly she cried: '*O mon Dieu!* how my arm hurts!' and became calm. A cross was graven as with a red-hot iron on her left arm.

"She has since told me that while before the altar of the Blessed Virgin all hell seemed to be let loose against her. The devils reproached themselves for their inability to keep her longer in their power . . . At the moment of her liberation she felt as it were a burning flame, which, originating in her throat and passing out of her mouth, lighted upon her arm, and then she became calm, joyous, and joined with us in blessing Jesus and Mary with all her heart.

"Meanwhile, what shall I say to you, venerable Confrère? That all is done? No. Never has the poor child had greater need of prayers. The good God has caused her to pass through ineffable trials.

"Therefore I address myself to you once more, to the end that you may pray and pray much for her."

CHAPTER XXXIV

HOW THE VENERABLE CURÉ OF ARS WAS VISITED BY VERY SEVERE AND CONTINUAL INTERIOR PAIN

Wherein you shall greatly rejoice, if now you must be for a little time made sorrowful in divers temptations : That the trial of your faith (much more precious than gold which is tried by the fire) may be found unto praise and glory and honour at the appearing of Jesus Christ : Whom having not seen, you love : in whom also now, though you see him not, you believe : and believing shall rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorified : Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. (I. Pet. i.; 6-9.)

MONTALEMBERT wrote in his introduction to *Les Moines d'Occident* that the power of the priest has its roots in the sufferings of this life ; and this was eminently true in the case of our Saint. When the reason is sought which during the last twenty-five years years of his apostolate caused him to take such an important part in the work of the Church of France and to occupy such a high place in the love and veneration of the people it is found in the two great attributes of the priesthood—prayer and sacrifice.

In order to draw souls to him, to move and transform them by the ardour of his charity, to make the confession of the most humiliating faults on the part of sinners more easy, to inspire them with the will and cause them to recover once more the supernatural power of doing their duty as Christians it was not sufficient for the Curé of Ars to exhort ; he had to pray and expiate. The disciple had—like his Master—to offer himself as a holocaust and spend of the fulness of his saintly life to the end that the life-giving sap instilled into withered souls might there circulate not only with light but with love. Everything that the Cross touches it fructifies. That is the secret of the long immolation voluntarily undertaken and cheerfully endured, the story of which as previously related has doubtless astonished more than one of our readers. In these days of feeble faith and feebler courage the world fails to understand that the love of a great soul stops at nothing and that the product of a love without limit is sacrifice. The power of love here below is nought else than the power to suffer. So our Lord often helps this desire of suffering in His apostles by an increase of affliction which, however bitter and penetrating it may be, nevertheless comes directly from His hand. The greater number of souls would live entirely closed to the souls of others if they never suffered anything. It is suffering that softens and compels them to pour out streams of benevolence and charity.

M. Vianney was no exception to this rule. Though he had

consecrated himself like a host upon an altar ; though he had given over his body to fasts, vigils and privation, his senses to mortification, and his entire life to the ungrateful labours of a rustic apostolate ; he was still visited by interior pains so severe and so continued that the number and intensity of them will never be known even imperfectly. I know not whether these pains will ever excite the pity of a world which not having experienced them may be excused for not understanding them, but I am pleased to think that they will excite its respect. Those who are astonished at them must have forgotten the desert where our Lord permitted Himself to be tempted ; the garden in which His soul was sorrowful, even unto death ; Calvary, on which the cry was wrung from Him : “ My God ! my God ! why hast thou forsaken me ? ” For the rest let everyone take comfort ; heaven does not treat the weak as though they were strong ; it tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, nor does it permit any to be tempted above his strength. It is a thought of St. Augustine that a Christian should suffer more than a man of the world, and a saint more than an ordinary Christian. M. Vianney was to be a saint ; therefore it was meet that he should be afflicted in an exceptional manner throughout his whole life.

We have it from the priest who was in a better position than anyone to read the innermost recesses of that heroic soul that in that soul, there reigned a most bitter habitual desolation. As if to increase his merit and render his zeal more disinterested our Lord had drawn a veil before his eyes in such wise that the Curé of Ars did not perceive the immense amount of good that was being effected through his own agency. He thought himself a useless person—without faith, intelligence, discernment or virtue. He was only fit to ruin everything, to disedify everyone, to be an obstacle to all good. The humility of his heart caused him to shed very real tears over his shortcomings, his want of devotion, his ignorance ; and his grief could only be stemmed by the generosity of a courage which urged him to cast himself headlong, with all his incapacities, into the arms of our Lord.

“ God,” said he, “ has done me this great mercy : that He has given me nothing on which I can lean—neither talent, knowledge, wisdom, strength nor virtue . . . When I enter into myself I can discover nothing but my poor sins. Nevertheless the good God so permits it that I do not see them all and that I do not know myself completely. That spectacle would cause me to despair. Against this temptation to despair I have only one resource : to throw myself at the foot of the tabernacle *like a little dog at the feet of its master.* ”

Here we have a circumstance hardly credible. This man—the marvel of his age, the admiration of all, the object of such unanimous respect, of a devotion so popular, that neither his

death nor the decision of the Church have been awaited to cause it to spring up round him with unexampled spontaneity ; this man whom we have heard called a " living relic," and to whom so many people were wont to come in search of support, light and consolation—lived under the shadow of overwhelming depression of spirit and distrust in himself.

The real motive of this depression was not lassitude, satiety of life, fatigue of mind or body, the inevitable need of tranquillity and repose that is found in every too-fully occupied existence ; nor was it chagrin at seeing himself so imperfect. It was the fear of doing badly at every turn of his life.

He would have willingly borne the spectacle of his own spiritual deformity, the burden of his barrenness and unfruitfulness, the horror of interior darkness, the feeling of incapacity joined to the necessity of acting in spite of it—of speaking, exhorting, resolving, of proceeding as though everything depended on his personal initiative or the assiduity and excellence of his work—in all of these things he would have taken his part. He understood that this disposition where one gives oneself up with blind faith ; where one walks like Abraham, ignorant of his way and reduced to humiliate oneself to find it in God ; where one progresses not by favour of wind and sails, but by force of rowing against the current ; where one constrains oneself, sacrifices one's own tastes, is in darkness but is content to be there, clings to God for Himself and not for the pleasure he finds in Him ; he understood that such a disposition is good and meritorious. He knew that the choice must be left to the Master, be it to permit us to feel His love in order to sustain our weakness and immaturity in the life of grace ; or be it to withdraw from us that sweet and consoling feeling which is only the milk for babes, in order to humble and show us whence the favour comes : to cause us to grow and become strong in the practice of faith by feeding on the bread of the strong in the sweat of our brow. He would have resigned himself willingly to all the sufferings arising out of disappointment with himself, could he have believed that God was satisfied with him ; but this consolation was not left to him. When sensible fervour suffers interruption, when grace is absent and interior pains press, the just man is no longer conscious of his own uprightness. In this state of poignant uncertainty as to whether he is pleasing to God, worthy of love or hate, his humility ever leans to the side of diffidence and severity. Thence arose in M. Vianney confusion at having committed some fault alternately with the fear of committing one. It was at the price of these sufferings that he acquired those three qualities which rendered his ministry so sure, so sweet and so fruitful, viz., knowledge of the divine methods, indulgence by which he esteemed everyone better than himself

and compassion towards those who were undergoing trials similar to his own.

In the history of the life of souls the earliest period is that of miracle and great joy. God invests the beginnings of everything with a singular beauty; He shows Himself more intimately and is more sensibly present in them, that He may have their first-fruits. The commencements of the interior life have a charm that many do not suspect; it is the spring-time and dawn of a higher life; no one can describe the peace, the delight and the hopefulness of it. God shows Himself at that time as does a mother whose son is about to embark upon a long and arduous journey; she is prodigal in her caresses, the remembrance of which will serve to sweeten the fatigues of the voyage and console him for the separation from her. This first stage is the time of the mercenary life, in which God gives all and man returns little. The next stage should be the time of the life of sacrifice where man, now become stronger and more generous, seeks to give God more. He that is only willing to experience the delights of the first stage and is not prepared to do his share and spend and immolate himself according to the measure of the graces he has received, by the practice of the robust and austere virtues that cause one to give to the Master as that Master has given, such a one does not deserve to feel the growth of the kingdom of God within him.

No doubt but that in these troublous times grace came—like the angel to our divine Lord—to the comfort of the Curé of Ars. In his case Thabor was always near the Garden of Olives; prayer strengthened his soul and alleviated his pains, but without causing them to disappear. The help he sought was given without his feeling it, though he was fully conscious of the persistent desolation. A great and profound sadness possessed his soul to its very depths; one of those sadnesses for which there is no remedy because when one suffers from it one does not wish to be cured; they are among the most precious things a man has. Sometimes it happened that he would allow something to escape him in intimate conversation, as may be seen from the one we are about to narrate.

M. Vianney was talking one day, and with a sadness inexpressibly profound, of the difficulties of a priest in corresponding to the sanctity of his vocation. His interlocutor, a young man of much promise, combined superior talent with an admirable simplicity, and he had remarked: "But, Monsieur le Curé, there are nevertheless some very good men among the clergy."

"What is that you say, my friend?" replied M. Vianney; "certainly there are good men amongst us! Great God! where should they be found, if not there? . . . But," he continued, with increasing animation, "to say Mass one ought to be a seraph!" . . . Here he began to weep. Then, after a moment's silence . . .

"Don't you see, my friend? I place HIM on my right and HE remains on my right! I place HIM on my left and HE stays there! If one only understood what the Mass is one would die! It is only in heaven that we shall understand the happiness of being able to say Mass! . . . My friend, the cause of all unhappiness and laxity in a priest is that he does not devote sufficient care to his Mass! Alas! my God! how much to be pitied is the priest who does that as though it were an ordinary thing! . . ." Here the holy Curé's tears redoubled . . . "Some there are who began so well—they said their Mass well for a few months! And then!" More tears. "Oh! when one thinks how our great God has deigned to confide such a thing to poor creatures like ourselves! . . . What does such harm is this news of the world, all this gossip, these politics, these newspapers . . . A man gets his head full of them, and then goes to say holy Mass or recite the breviary. For my own part, my great desire would be to retire to Fourvières, where, having charge of no one and having said my prayers well, I could spend my time in the hospital. Oh! how happy should I be!" Here M. Vianney mentioned the name of a priest well-known to his young visitor. "He wanted to belong to a religious congregation, he said, and was going to enter among the Marists. Theirs is a work after the heart of the good God, because it entails humility, simplicity and contradiction. Things go well there. If I could I would become a Marist myself. But as this gentleman's parents had made sacrifices on his behalf he decided to accept a benefice in order to be able to help them—for the present, as he said. Now he does not think of his original project of becoming a religious any more. Oh! when a man has taken the first step, when he has begun, how difficult it is to get free."

"And you, Monsieur le Curé, if Mgr. Devie would permit it, you would very soon get free, wouldn't you?"

The holy Curé smiled sadly as he answered:

"Oh! yes, certainly! Eh! my friend, we must not lose confidence . . . But, as you know, the breviary is very sparsely peopled with canonised curés. This one was a friar, that one a missionary; there are plenty there who had other vocations. St. John Francis Regis and St. Vincent de Paul did not want to remain curés to the end of their lives . . . See! there are even more canonised bishops, although their number is small in comparison with that of the priests . . . You, my friend, are a sub-deacon; oh! how happy you ought to be! Once a man is a priest he has nothing left but to weep over his *poor misery* . . ." Another pause and more tears. "*To be a saint it is necessary to be beside oneself, to lose one's head entirely* . . . What hinders us other priests from becoming saints is lack of reflection. We do not enter into ourselves; we do not appreciate what we are doing.

Reflection, prayer, union with God, are what is wanting in us ! . . . Oh ! how unhappy is it for a priest not to be an interior man ! . . . But, to be that we need tranquillity, silence, retirement, my friend, retirement ! It is in solitude that God speaks to us . . . Sometimes I tell Mgr. Devie : ' If you would convert your diocese you must make saints of all your curés.' Ah ! my friend, it is a fearful thing to be a priest. Confessions ! Sacraments ! what a responsibility ! Oh ! if one only realised what it is to be a priest, one would fly to the deserts like the saints in order to escape it ! . . . The best way of being a good priest would be to live like a seminarian . . . But one cannot do that always. The great misfortune for us curés is that our minds get blunted. At the outset we are much concerned at the state of those of our people who do not love God ; and we end by saying : ' Well, there are some who do their duty and that is all to the good ! Others there are who never come near the sacraments ; well, so much the worse for them !' . . . And we do neither more nor less in consequence . . . "

The Curé of Ars added that another peril for a priest is found in isolation. And he described this isolation of curés as a formidable snare and a source of temptation. Unfortunately the last part of his utterance on this occasion was not preserved, and we regret the fact, for it concerns a vital question and would have completed the very remarkable appreciation of the duties and dangers of a curé's life.

On one occasion M. Vianney was confiding his sorrows to a colleague for whom he had a great affection. " I am withering up with disgust of this poor world," said he ; " my soul is sorrowful even unto death. My ears hear nothing but things that rend my heart . . . I have no time to pray to the good God. I cannot endure them any longer. Tell me, would it be gravely sinful in me to disobey my Bishop by going away secretly ?" " Monsieur le Curé " replied his confidant, " if you want to lose the entire fruit of your labours at a single blow you have only to yield to this temptation."

Towards the end of his life the sorrows of the holy man pressed more hardly on him than ever. Some months before he died he repeated with a sweetness that was overlaid with intense pain : " Oh ! how sad is life ! If when I came to Ars I could have foreseen the suffering that awaited me there I should have expired on the spot from apprehension."

Another day, when the heat had been terrific, the crowd enormous, and the indefatigable labourer of his Lord was leaving his confessional after a day of pain, more broken than usual : " I think," he remarked to us, as he stopped and regarded with something of envy some hens which, having scratched holes in the sand of the courtyard, were now resting peacefully in the shade with

their heads under their wings, "I think those hens are very happy ! If they had but a soul I should like to be in their place !"

But one might ask, did not all his assiduous labours, devoid of any relaxation, in the pulpit and confessional avail to take him out of himself ? It might have been supposed so ; but such was not the case. The very confidence reposed in him was a burden under which he bent and groaned unceasingly. Even in the heat of work the spirit of trial was ever present to him, causing him to suffer doubly—from his own interior sorrow and also from the violence which he was obliged to do to himself. The prodigious concourse of people opened a new and ever recurring source of disquiet and consternation in his soul ; it wounded his humility ; it increased his fears of doing badly ; and augmented the weight—already sufficiently heavy—of his pastoral responsibility. Instead of concluding that he was endowed with a special grace, virtue, or charm—something, in fact, that could be nothing less than the gift of heaven—which attracted such multitudes, he concluded that he must be a hypocrite. No other explanation was possible of the persistence of so many strangers in coming to see, hear and consult him. Evidently they were all misled—but how and by whom ? He could not account for it ; but of one thing he was only too firmly convinced, viz., that he himself was the most unworthy and miserable of priests.

One other matter troubled him more than all the rest. Anxiety, humiliation and sadness he accepted, but he could not tolerate sin. The vision of evil excited in him the feelings of a son who sees his father insulted. Sin drew cries of pain from him and caused him to feel as one sick unto death. Every rebuff offered to God struck him in the tenderest and most sensitive part of his being. The very idea of such a thing caused him to shudder with horror. He could say with David : "My eyes have sent forth springs of water : . . . my zeal hath made me pine away . . . fainting hath taken hold of me, because of the wicked that forsake thy law." (Ps. cxviii., 136-9, 53). Nor did custom ever dull this feeling in him, for it was one of those that are never dormant, which are always ready to spring forth despite all efforts to restrain them. This explains why he used often to repeat that he knew of nobody so unhappy as himself.

"My God !" he exclaimed one day, "how heavy the time hangs upon me among sinners ! when shall I be with the saints ?

"There is so much offence of the good God," said he, on other occasions, "that one is tempted to ask for the end of all things ! . . . If there were not to be found a few good souls here and there to console the eye and comfort the heart for all the evil one sees and hears, life would be unendurable . . .

"When one thinks," added he, weeping bitterly, "when one

thinks of the ingratitude of man towards the good God one is tempted to flee—beyond the sea—so as to be spared the spectacle. It is frightful! Even if the good God were not so good! but He is so good! . . . O my God! my God! what shame will be ours when the Day of Judgment reveals the extent of our ingratitude! We shall understand then . . . but it will be too late. Our Lord will say to us: 'Wherefore hast thou offended me?' And we shall have nothing to say for ourselves."

These considerations always terminated with the sorrowful exclamation: "No! poor sinners are altogether too unhappy!"

"See," said the Curé, in his catechisms; "behold our Lord crowned with thorns. Blood trickles from every part of His head; it is on account of an evil thought to which you have consented. Next contemplate the flagellation: all His flesh is torn off, mangled, His entire body broken; a spot the size of a pin's head without a wound is not to be found. It is your sins of impurity for which He atones . . ."

"No," said he once more, in a tone of bitterest desolation and with a face bathed in tears, "No! there is no person in the world so unhappy as a priest! How does he spend his life? In seeing the good God offended; His Holy Name ever blasphemed! His commandments violated! His love outraged! The priest sees nothing, hears nothing but that . . . Like St. Peter he is always at the prætorium of Pilate; he is always beholding our Lord insulted, treated with contempt, derided, covered with opprobrium. Some spit in His face, some put on Him a crown of thorns; others smite Him heavily. They push Him to and fro; throw Him to the ground; trample Him under foot; crucify Him; they pierce His Heart . . . Ah! had I but known what it is to be a priest, instead of going to the seminary I should have escaped to La Trappe . . ." Whereupon a voice from the middle of the crowd exclaimed: "My God! What a misfortune that would have been for us!" Such scenes were not rare at Ars. The feelings of many were so profoundly moved that the situation might become dramatic at any moment.

This holy sorrow increased in intensity on days more particularly consecrated to the commemoration of the sufferings of our Lord. On Fridays, for example, the physiognomy of the holy Curé was seen to be completely altered, and his pallor of countenance and eyes clouded by tears spoke of the bitter reflections within.

As a rule, however, nothing of these struggles with himself appeared outwardly, so powerfully did he exert himself to possess his soul in patience. To the casual observer the habitual calm and serenity gave no indication of the storm that was raging within. But his countenance, in which benevolence was the prevailing

characteristic when he looked upon others, assumed a mournful and involuntary sadness when he turned his gaze inward upon himself, because he there found himself confronted with his own defects, weaknesses and *all the miseries of his poor life*. On such occasions he simply bowed his head and allowed the tempest to pass over him without altering his resolutions or his conduct. He prayed more than usual; redoubled his fasts, penances and mortifications; and while keeping himself more united to God was careful to labour as assiduously as before. However gloomy the heavens might look and whatever the state of his own heart might be, he pursued his way with the same sprightly step and the same air of tranquillity and satisfaction. Never did his interior sufferings cause his foot to slip or force him to deviate from the path he had marked out for himself. The trials of this interior martyrdom were often augmented by the fact that all the miseries and scandals of the entire world seemed to be brought before him as though by some invisible current. "Ah! it is here," he used to say, "that one must come if one would know how much evil the sin of Adam has wrought!"

One trial was hardly disposed of before another commenced. What troubles perplexities and vexations beset him on account of a single circumstance connected with a certain celebrated apparition—which circumstance made considerable sensation under the title of the "Incident of Ars"—will never be known.

This is the proper place to speak of this incident which party spirit has seen fit to invest with so much mystery. We shall do so the more freely seeing that our intention is not to pass judgment on the facts but to relate them in all their simplicity with entire good faith, as becomes our character of historian.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE VENERABLE CURÉ OF ARS AND LA SALETTE

To the righteous a light is risen up in darkness. (Ps. cxi., 4.)

Wherefore, if I was silent, fault nor praise I to myself impute ; by equal doubts held in suspense ; since of necessity it happened. Silent was I, yet desire was painted in my looks . . . And thence doth doubt spring, like a shoot, around the stock of truth . . . (Dante, *Paradise*, c. iv.)

It is certain that the Curé of Ars was one of the first to believe that the Blessed Virgin had appeared to the little shepherds of the Alps and to rejoice at this precious token of hope vouchsafed to the world. In proof whereof we have a letter addressed to Mgr. de Bruillard, Bishop of Grenoble, in which M. Vianney declares that he has the greatest confidence in Our Lady of La Salette, and that he has blessed and distributed a great number of pictures and medals representing the scene of the apparition. "I was anxious to possess a piece of the rock on which the Blessed Virgin stood ; I carry it about me continually. I have frequently spoken of this miracle in church."

In the autumn of 1849 Maximin came to Ars. The Abbé Raymond was then acting as coadjutor to the holy Curé. With the idea of testing the good faith of the little shepherd he (M. Raymond) received him with an air of severity, assumed an attitude of incredulity, and, in the course of a rather discouraging interview, told him that though he might have taken others in he would not deceive the Curé of Ars. He reminded him of the history of certain young girls who, some thirty years previously, had also fabricated an apparition ; and had afterwards confessed their imposture. Maximin, losing patience, replied with heat—as he is said to have done on other occasions : "Well ! have it then that I am a liar and have seen nothing." On the following day he had two separate interviews with M. le Curé ; the first in the sacristy, the second behind the altar.

Maximin did not make a very good impression at Ars. He appeared to be much as Mgr. Dupanloup described him in his account of the visit he made to La Salette in 1849. "I have seen many children in the course of my life," said the eminent prelate, "but I have seen few or none who made such an unfavourable impression on me. His manners, gestures, look—his whole exterior in fact—is repulsive, in my eyes at least. What has added to the unfavourable impression I formed is that he bears a singular resemblance to one of the most disagreeable and naughtiest children I have ever had under my care . . . Maximin's churlishness is uncommon, his restlessness quite extraordinary ; his

is a curious nature—extravagant, changeable, frivolous; but with a frivolousness so unmannerly, a changeableness so violent and an extravagance so insupportable that the first day I saw him I was not only saddened but discouraged . . . ”*

What was it that passed between the Curé of Ars and Maximin? What was plain to us was that after this interview M. Vianney refused to sign pictures of La Salette or distribute medals: that was how it became known that he no longer believed in the miracle. When asked to explain, his invariable reply was: “If what that child told me is true we cannot believe in it.”

This news spread very quickly, to the delight of some and the painful surprise of others. But then, what had Maximin said? Much has been written on the subject. Perhaps nobody had better opportunities of arriving at the truth than the Abbé Toccanier and the Missionaries of the diocese of Belley. On two occasions have we ourself had a conversation on this delicate subject with the servant of God in presence of a few witnesses who can probably recollect as well as we the details of what passed. Here they are in all their simplicity. If perchance anything has been altered it is only by the omission of the very little that has escaped our memory in the six years that have elapsed:

“Monsieur le Curé, what ought we to think of La Salette?”

“My friend, you are at liberty to think what you will; it is not an article of faith. As for myself, I think we ought to love the Blessed Virgin very much.” “Would it be indiscreet to ask you to be so kind as to tell us what passed between yourself and Maximin in the interview that has made such a stir? What precisely is the impression you retain concerning it?”

“If Maximin told me the truth he did not see the Blessed Virgin.”

“But, Monsieur le Curé, they say that the Abbé Raymond caused the child to lose all patience and that it was to rid himself of the annoyance that he said he had seen nothing.”

“I don’t know what M. Raymond may have done; but I do know that I certainly did not exasperate him. All I did when he was brought to me was to say: ‘It is you then, my friend, who have seen the Blessed Virgin?’”

“Maximin did not say that he had seen the Blessed Virgin; he only said he had seen a noble lady . . . Perhaps that is the origin of the misunderstanding.”

“No, my friend, the child told me that it was not true; that he had seen nothing.” “How is it then that you did not require him to make a public retraction?” “I said to him: ‘My child,

*We have the less hesitation in quoting this appreciation of the Bishop of Orleans, inasmuch as it did not prevent him believing in the miracle. If his testimony ended by becoming favourable to Maximin, it is certainly not suspect; and it cannot be said that he was charmed into an error of judgment.

if you have told a falsehood you must withdraw it.' He replied : ' There is no need of that ; it does good. Many people have been converted.' Then he added : ' I should like to make a general confession and enter a religious house. When I am there I shall say that I have told everything and have no more to say.' I rejoined : ' My friend, things cannot go on like this ; I must consult my Bishop.' ' Very well then, Monsieur le Curé, consult him. But it is hardly worth while.' Thereupon Maximin made his confession."

M. Vianney added : " We must not be troubled over the matter . . . If it is not true it will come to nothing of its own accord. If it be the work of God men will try in vain ; it is not they who will destroy it."

" Monsieur le Curé, are you sure you understood what Maximin said ?"

" Oh ! quite sure ! There are some people who want to make out that I am deaf !* What have they not said ? . . . That does not seem to me to be the way to uphold the truth."

The above is the faithful account of our conversation, giving the facts of the too-celebrated interview between the Curé of Ars and Maximin. Every word is recorded as it came from the lips of the venerable M. Vianney ; and he never spoke in any other sense than that. It is quite incontestable that he believed that Maximin had declared to him that he (Maximin) *had not seen the Blessed Virgin ; that he had seen nothing*. And it was this declaration, clear and categorical, that involved him in such great perplexity.

He was inclined to believe both by the natural bent of his heart and, after the pronouncement of the Bishop of Grenoble, by his respect for episcopal authority ; but in his uprightness and simplicity he could not persuade himself that he had not understood what had been so clearly and distinctly articulated ; and he struggled hopelessly against the doubts raised by Maximin's assertion. It is only thus that we can reconcile his apparently contradictory replies. When he regarded the action of the Bishop of Grenoble and the significance of his approbation M. Vianney would reply that one might believe. He permitted the pilgrimage and encouraged it if needs were. If pressed for his personal opinion he avoided giving a reply ; if on account of the position of his questioner he could not refuse to explain he relapsed into

*This unfortunate assertion—due, in the first instance, to Maximin—has been repeated in nearly every work written in defence of La Salette, much to the scandal of the people of Ars, for it is absolutely contrary to truth. M. Vianney was extremely keen of hearing, so much so that he had to wrap up his watch at night because its ticking prevented him from going to sleep. It is more true to urge that he was only heard with difficulty himself, and the hypothesis that Maximin, not understanding his questions, answered at random, would be more admissible.

hesitation and answered that *if the child had told him true one could not believe it*. When he was eagerly pressed by people who did not perceive how indiscreet they were to relate the details of his interview with Maximin and repeat the words he had heard, we have seen him sometimes pass a shrivelled hand across his forehead, as if to wipe away a painful memory, and say in a pleading tone, as one who asks to be excused: "This wearies me! it makes my head ache! . . ."

In an account which forms part of his beautiful book, *Les Serviteurs de Dieu*, M. Leon Aubineau seems to us to have faithfully portrayed the attitude of mind of M. Vianney:

"The Curé of Ars had too much experience of spiritual matters not to be struck by the nature of the events connected with La Salette; his piety impelled him to rely upon this new token of mercy conceded to man. But the retractation he believed himself to have heard re-echoed in his ears and carried distress to his mind. He had attempted to efface the recollection of it. He knew the abuse that would be made of his name in this connexion; he was not without an interior presentiment that the Mother of God herself might be grieved; and anxieties, perplexities and unheard-of troubles entered upon him. He had wished that he had never heard the words that tormented him so; but the enemy was not inclined to allow him to forget them, and persistently repeated them in his ear. Many a time did the good Curé lay open his troubles. In vain did friends try to deaden the remembrance, to silence the echo ever vibrating in his heart. They suggested that the child of La Salette had perhaps been rather giving way to impatience than bearing witness to truth, and that he had been very much pestered at Ars: 'Alas!' replied the Curé, 'it was not I who pestered him.' And his distress persisted.

"'If you but knew what a weight, what a chill, what pain afflicts my soul!' said the venerable Curé to a pilgrim who guarantees the accuracy of the expressions . . . 'Oh! I can endure it no longer! My God, deliver me! When I succeed in throwing off my doubts I find peace immediately, I fly upwards! . . . But the devil drives me back into doubt again and then I am dragged along as over thorns and flints' "

The trial lasted for eight years; then there came a day when we learned that the uncertainties and hesitations of the holy priest had ceased. This change was not credited at first, but we had to yield to the evidence adduced. In the month of October, 1858, the Abbé Toccanier wrote to a barrister at Marseilles who was known by his various works on La Salette:

"Since my last letter M. le Curé has given me a very clear explanation concerning his return to his primitive belief which had been shaken by the unfortunate retractation of Maximin. Here are the details; they will gratify you. M. le Curé told me

he had prayed the good God to deliver him from the doubts which only respect for episcopal authority had enabled him to repel. 'For a fortnight,' added he, 'I experienced great disquiet, which only ceased when I said *Credo*. I wanted to find some opportunity of manifesting my faith to someone from the diocese of Grenoble, and behold who should appear in the sacristy next day but a priest whom I did not know and who asked if one could and ought to believe in La Salette. I replied: 'Yes. I have asked for a temporal favour from God at the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, invoked under her title of Our Lady of La Salette; I obtained it.'

"In spite then of the retraction of Maximin M. le Curé believes in La Salette. Here is a new incident of Ars, and one calculated to cause as much satisfaction as its predecessor did the reverse."

About the same time M. Guillemin, Canon and Vicar-General of Belley, came to Ars with a commission from an eminent personage to enquire of the holy Curé what the circumstances were that had influenced his convictions relative to La Salette. He left us an account of his visit conforming in every point to the one we have just read:—

"The Curé of Ars has for about three months experienced an interior pain which lasts some time and deprives him of rest.

"One night when this moral suffering was very insistent he entreated the Lord to deliver him from it. He thought he would obtain this grace if he made an act of faith concerning the matter of La Salette. Consequently he said: 'I believe.' He was instantaneously delivered from this pain, which had then troubled him for fifteen days. He felt as *though a leaden weight had been removed from his shoulders*.

"In order to confirm what had just happened M. Vianney besought God to send to him some priest of notable position in the diocese of Grenoble. On the following morning while he was in his sacristy an ecclesiastic, stating himself to be a professor at the Seminary of Grenoble, presented himself and without further preamble put this question to him: 'Monsieur le Curé, what do you think of La Salette?' M. Vianney replied: 'I think not only that one can but that one ought to believe in it.' Since then, our holy Curé declares that he has obtained a special grace at the intercession of Our Lady of La Salette."

The Abbé Gerin, Archpriest of Grenoble Cathedral, came to Ars on 12th October, when the holy Curé received him with the following words:

"I thank you for having come to see me. I have much to say to you relative to Our Lady of La Salette. Words fail me to describe the anguish through which my soul has passed. To give you an idea, imagine yourself as one in a desert in the midst of a whirlwind of sand and not knowing in which direction to turn.

Then amid my perplexities and sufferings I cried aloud : *Credo !* Instantly I recovered the peace and tranquillity which before had been entirely lost to me. I asked God to send me a learned priest from Grenoble, one capable of appreciating my dispositions and feelings on this subject. The priest came next day. What was his name ? I don't recollect it ; he is a professor at the seminary. Now, it would be impossible for me not to believe in La Salette. I asked for signs to enable me to believe ; I have received them. One can and one ought to believe in La Salette."

CHAPTER XXXVI

HOW THE VENERABLE CURÉ OF ARS WAS TORMENTED BY THE DESIRE FOR SOLITUDE

Who will give me wings like a dove, and I will fly and be at rest? Lo, I have gone far off flying away . . . (Ps. liv., 7-8.)

As he journeyed, a sickness from which he suffered while going, but which was relieved when he turned back, forced him to retrace his steps. (Roman Breviary, Lect. of St. Romuald.)

IN 1843 the Abbé Raymond, Curé of Savigneux, offered himself to share the labours of the servant of God, and while for ten years he laboured with an indefatigable zeal in the service of the pilgrimage he surrounded M. Vianney with a wealth of affection which the latter was not slow to return. "I don't know whether it is because I love him," said the good Curé, "but it seems to me that nobody preaches like the Abbé Raymond . . . I owe him a great deal: he has done me good service, both in instructing my parishioners and in apprising me of my own shortcomings!"

The good Curé never entered upon any work of importance without the advice and consent of his colleague, to whom he was accustomed to render an account of all his proceedings. One day it happened that he had given a considerable sum of money without acquainting M. Raymond of the fact. In his regret that by *his want of frankness* he might have grieved a man to whom he was so much attached he knew not how to make amends for his lapse. "Never," said the directresses of the *Providence* to us, "did a dutiful child show more regret and confusion for keeping something from the knowledge of its mother."

But though M. Raymond only arrived at Ars in 1843, Almighty God so arranged that for the future glorification of His servant a witness who would be able to bear witness to his eminent virtues later on should be led to Ars in May, 1839. He permitted that an ecclesiastic of repute, the Abbé Tailhades, of the diocese of Montpellier, who had always felt a pronounced taste for missions, should be allowed by his superiors to follow his bent.

The reputation for sanctity of the Curé of Ars inspired in M. Tailhades the idea of seeking from this man of God the counsel which should guide him in his new career. He remained at Ars at various intervals for three or four months at a time. Had divine Providence not ordained otherwise, he would willingly have made his home in the neighbourhood of the holy priest.

"From the date of my first appearance at Ars," wrote the Abbé Tailhades to us, "I saw and heard nothing but what I had been led to expect. I thought it my duty to warn the three young

women who directed the *Providence*, took care of the Curé and had the privilege of being constantly near him, what an important mission was theirs; how they had a saint, and a great saint too, beside them; that later, if they survived their Curé, they would be called upon to give their testimony; that this testimony would be of the very highest importance; that in order to prepare themselves to fulfil this duty they would do well to keep an account and register in it the more wonderful things day by day as they occurred at Ars. 'We should have plenty to do then,' replied Jeanne-Marie Chaney, thus giving me to understand that they assisted at marvels daily and that these by mere force of repetition had become ordinary events which excited no remark."

During his stay the Abbé Tailhades was most useful to the servant of God in relieving him of some of the duties of his ministry. The Curé of Ars never wrote letters—he had no time to do so. M. Tailhades acted as his secretary and answered the most pressing letters. On one occasion he had undertaken to deliver a message to the venerable Bishop of Belley. Mgr. Devie received him with his accustomed kindness and entered into confidential conversation. "M. l'abbé, you have now been some time at Ars, you have had opportunities of seeing M. Vianney close to and observing him at leisure; tell me now what do you think of him?" "Monseigneur, I think he is a saint." "That is exactly my own opinion too," replied the pious and learned prelate.

The service rendered by the Abbé Tailhades during the few months he passed under the direction of the Curé of Ars, suggested to the latter the idea he carried out later on—that of associating a priest with himself who should lighten his burden.

When about to take his leave of M. Vianney the Abbé Tailhades went to kneel at the feet of the holy priest for the last time and receive absolution from him. But what was his discomfiture when he heard his confessor impose upon him as his penance that he should never breathe a word of anything he might have learned concerning himself personally that was of such a nature as to attract any sort of reputation to him. The penitent modestly protested against this unexpected prohibition. "Well then! be it so," replied the confessor; "say what you will concerning the Curé of Ars in other parishes; it makes no difference; as nobody knows me there they will pay no attention; but I include in my prohibition the dioceses of Belley and Lyons."

In the summer of 1859 (?1858), a year before M. Vianney's death, when we undertook a journey to Montpellier in order to interview the good Abbé Tailhades in his own parish and obtain from him information concerning things that no one knew but he, after having opened the treasury of his memory, still full of reminiscences of Ars religiously preserved, and before showing us his

collection of autographs, notes and manuscripts, the Abbé, suddenly remembering the penance he had received, remarked that we had done well to come to him in his own parish to inspect the documents. He could not, he said, have communicated their contents to us within the limits of the dioceses of Lyons or Belley; nor would he have felt justified in transmitting them to us by letter.

Towards the close of his memorable episcopate a fresh project was conceived in the apostolic heart of Mgr. Devie. The future of a young generation of missionaries which had recently been formed under his auspices was under consideration. Sundry schemes of organisation were discussed, and the Bishop finally decided to make Ars a branch of Pont-d'Ain, so that the missionaries he had succeeded in gathering together having a perpetual spectacle of sanctity before their eyes might be the more penetrated with the virtues that go to form apostles in that great school of humility, poverty and mortification.

And now the eminent prelate had just finished his long and beautiful career. He was dead, full of years and merits, crowned with graces, followed by benedictions and remembered with gratitude and respect. Mgr. Chalandon, the man of his own choice, had succeeded him.

"I had followed the exercises of the annual retreat at the Greater Seminary at Brou," relates the Abbé Toccanier, "and was preparing to retire to my beloved solitude at Pont-d'Ain once more when M. Camelot, my superior, came to tell me that Mgr. Chalandon, in order to realise the desires of his venerable predecessor, was giving us to the Curé of Ars as auxiliaries, to meet the ever-increasing demands of the pilgrimage; and that it was I who had been selected to represent the Society there. He added that I would be installed on the following day by the Vicar-General. The Curé of Ars received me with his usual kindness; but nevertheless I noticed an air of reserve and anxiety about him."

That desire for solitude which had never quitted him in the midst of a life so troubled inwardly albeit so peaceful to all appearances, awoke once more in the soul of M. Vianney. The change that had now taken place seemed to him a favourable opportunity to relinquish a ministry of which he was not so much weary as terrified. That ministry had been as painful as it had been meritorious. It had involved much more abnegation for him than for most others, because it had involved the sacrifice of all his tastes, aspirations and preferences. The idea of fleeing to La Trappe, Carmel, La Grande-Chartreuse, or some distant solitude, there to *weep over his poor life and see if even now the good God would have mercy upon him*, had long been fixed in his mind. Once already had he, as we have seen, escaped from his parish and remained

hidden for more than a week at his old home at Dardilly. Three years previously to that attempt—in 1840—he had made another one. It was on a very dark night and he had got as far as the cross at Les Combes on the Villefranche road. There he suddenly stopped and reflected: “Am I really doing the will of God just now? Would not the conversion of a single soul be of more value than all the prayers I might offer up in solitude?” His own heart supplied the answer and accepting it as the voice of God he determined to go back. On the arrival of a missionary in the parish he felt this craving for solitude assert itself more imperiously than ever and call him to seek some obscure retreat inaccessible to men where he would be free from that pastoral responsibility which daily affrighted him more and more, where he could recollect himself a little in God before passing away from this life, where he could enjoy silence and peace.

During the forenoon of Sunday, 3rd September—the day after the installation of M. Toccanier—M. Vianney sought the two women who had worked for him since the suppression of the *Providence*, Catherine Lassagne and Jeanne Filliat, and communicated his intentions to them under promise of secrecy. Towards noon he said to Brother Jérôme*: “Catherine has a thousand francs in her keeping” (this was the amount necessary to complete what was required for the establishment of the Brothers of the Holy Family); “obtain them from her at once, so as not to forget it and in case I should not see you again.” These last words struck the brother and he hastened to repeat them to his superior. The latter already had his own suspicions of something being about to happen, as he knew that Catherine had received instructions some days before to prepare a trunk and some linen.

The preliminaries of the departure were arranged at Catherine’s house after night prayers. The Curé of Ars laughed at all the prayers and entreaties that were made to induce him to remain. A little later Brother Jérôme, who had forgotten to close the sacristy and was now going back to repair the omission, met Catherine, red-eyed and very much upset. She said to him: “You seem very gay, Brother Jérôme!” “I have no reason to be anything else,” replied he. “I am very sad indeed,” she rejoined. “What’s the matter then?” “I cannot tell you.” Discretion kept her silent, but her love for souls prompted her to turn her back on the brother, fix her gaze on the presbytery windows and ejaculate: “O my God! and will you permit our Father to leave us?” “What’s that you say?” said the good brother. “Nothing; I said nothing! It was not to you I spoke.”

But Catherine had said enough. Much concerned at what he

*One of the Brothers of the Holy Family established at Ars. He served the holy Curé with the utmost devotion, and the latter delighted to confide in him.

had heard, Brother Jérôme ran to tell his superior and the two repaired to the house of the missionary to take counsel. They decided to station a watchman in the garden. M. des Garets was informed as to what was thought to be in preparation. He was rather inclined to make light of it and simply asked that he might be told if anything actually happened.

At midnight a light was noticed in the presbytery windows ; all the doors were watched and someone was sent to warn the missionary who had simply thrown himself on his bed with his clothes on. The latter will tell the story for us.

"In the middle of the night vigorous knocks on my door roused me from a fitful slumber ; and in a moment I was out in the square with the two brothers, watching the movements of M. le Curé, the light of whose lamp allowed us to see him without being seen ourselves. We saw him take his hat and breviary, come downstairs and direct his steps in the direction of Catherine's little abode. We hid ourselves so as not to be observed. But at the moment when after having knocked he said : "Are you ready ? Then let us get away at once," all three of us appeared on the threshold of the half-opened door.

"On seeing himself intercepted M. Vianney turned to Catherine, who was in tears, and said, in a severe tone : 'Catherine, what have you done ? You have betrayed me !' Then Brother Athanasius addressed him. 'Where are you going, Monsieur le Curé ? We are aware you wish to leave us ; but if you go we shall ring the alarm-bell.' 'Do so !' replied M. Vianney ; 'do so, but let me pass on.'

"I hung on to the steps of the fugitive," continues the Abbé Toccanier, "haranguing him as best I could. When I saw that argument was useless an idea came to me. The darkness was intense ; I possessed myself of the lantern that had been prepared beforehand to light him on his way. As M. le Curé still persisted in his resolution with a desperate energy, I took away his breviary in hopes of forcing him to return ; but he only said, tranquilly, that he would recite his Office when he reached Lyons. 'What ! Monsieur le Curé,' said I, severely, 'you will pass a whole day without reciting your breviary ?' At this unexpected reproach, he replied, with an embarrassed air : 'I have another breviary at home, which belonged to Mgr. Devie.' 'Very well, Monsieur le Curé, we will go back and get it.' And so he consented to retrace his steps.

"We were at the cross-roads when the first notes of the alarm-bell sounded. 'It is the *Angelus*,' said Brother Jérôme. M. Vianney knelt at the foot of the cross at Le Tonneau, and commenced the *Angelus* aloud. 'Suppose we add a decade of the rosary, for your safe journey,' said I, leaving him under his illusion about the *Angelus* and trying to gain as much time as possible. 'No, no, I can say my rosary on the way.'

"The nearer we approached the church the greater grew the crowd. M. le Curé appeared neither surprised nor disconcerted. He reached the presbytery, went rapidly upstairs and into his room. I entered close behind and remained with him, seemingly engaged in looking for the book he required, but really stirring and mixing things up so that he could not find anything. I hindered his finding the volume he sought by causing it to disappear the moment he had his hand upon it. Suddenly in the midst of all these manœuvres my eye fell on a portrait of Mgr. Devie hanging on the wall. Remembering the story of his previous flight as told me by M. Raymond, I interjected sharply: 'Monsieur le Curé, look at Mgr. Devie! I am sure he is looking very cross with you! One ought to respect the wishes of one's bishop during his life, and much more so after his death... Remember what he said to you ten years ago!' Disturbed by the recollection of one whom he had always loved and venerated, M. Vianney stammered out, with the candour of a child threatened with the paternal wrath: 'Monseigneur will not scold me! He knows very well what need I have to weep over my poor life.'

"On leaving the room we encountered the Comte des Garets on the stair-head. He had come armed with the influence of their long-standing friendship to try to induce M. Vianney to change his resolution. The latter hardly appeared to listen to him; he replied very drily to all entreaties and left him under the impression that in seeking to fly he was yielding to a presentiment God had given him of approaching death."

It seemed to the witnesses of this scene that the Curé of Ars evinced in thought, voice, the movement of his lips, in his expression, usually so serene and amiable, a mixture of irony, sadness and bitterness against all things which they had never seen before and which astonished them exceedingly.

Meanwhile the village had been aroused by the first sound of the bell and could distinguish nothing amid the noise but the cry: "M. le Curé! M. le Curé!" Imagination ran riot. Men ran out, armed with guns, pitch-forks and sticks; some, thinking a fire had broken out, brought buckets; they filled the square and surrounded the presbytery, while the women prayed aloud in the church. The courtyard was crowded with people. "Never did a scene better represent," says Catherine, "the taking of our Lord in the Garden of Olives—with this difference, that our Lord was insulted and M. le Curé was not."

—M. Vianney had much trouble in forcing a passage through the crowd. This became much worse when he tried to go out: they refused to open the gate which led to the street. A man well-known in Ars for his devotion planted himself before it and faced the Curé with clenched fists: "No, Monsieur le Curé, no! I say you shall not pass!" "Very well then, let me alone!"

replied the good Curé, with his habitual sweetness of manner. Then he tried the other door, only to find that closed. "In this manner he went from one exit to another," says Catherine, "never losing his temper; but I think he was weeping." All the while the crowd ceased not to implore him, making the same appeal as did the disciples at Emmaus to our Lord: "Stay with us! stay with us!" while M. Toccanier, M. des Garets and the brothers continued in the same strain. Then the gate was opened and M. le Curé gained the open street.

"This seemed to me to be the opportunity," says M. Toccanier, "to make a last attempt. I addressed him with all the vehemence I could command, God giving me words. I cannot recollect all I said; but some part I do remember: 'What! Monsieur le Curé, you who are so familiar with the lives of the saints, have you forgotten the persevering zeal of St. Martin who with the crown already within his grasp could cry: *Non recuso laborem*? . . . And you are going to quit the field before the day's work is done! . . . Have you forgotten the words of St. Philip Neri: "Though I were at the gate of paradise, if a sinner asked for my ministrations I would turn away from the whole court of heaven to attend to him?" And you, Monsieur le Curé, can you have the heart to leave the unfinished confessions of these poor pilgrims who have come so far to make them?'

"'Will you not be answerable for their souls before God?'"

Every word was echoed by the crowd of parishioners and strangers, who fell on their knees before the holy priest. "Yes, Father, let us finish our confessions. Don't go away without hearing us!" And so, surrounded by a crowd which became more and more compact, he was practically carried into the church.

The holy Curé knelt outside the choir according to his usual custom and wept for a long time; then he went into the sacristy, where he remained a few minutes with M. des Garets; after which he went tranquilly back to his confessional as though nothing had happened. Meanwhile carriages had gone to Trévoux in search of M. Poncet, the Vicar-General, to Beauregard and Jassans to bring back the Abbé Raymond and the Abbé Beaux, M. Vianney's confessor. These gentlemen quickly appeared and added their entreaties to the rest, conjuring the holy Curé not to think any more of flight. But he would promise nothing.

During the three following days the Curé of Ars was visited by extraordinary graces and consolations. Thus did heaven reward him for the sacrifice he had made of his own inclinations. In after days when M. Toccanier pressed him with questions as to the real motive of his attempted departure he would reply that he had done it in order to be able to say to the good God: "If I have died a curé it is you who wished it; it was none of my doing."

And indeed Almighty God did wish him to die at his post ; and this divine will was manifested by signs more and more evident. Divine Providence alone could have induced him to reject several offers made by persons who came expressly for the purpose of taking him away by night and conducting him to Lyons or Dardilly. The hand of Providence was directly visible in an episode where it seemed to be most difficult to counteract his project. M. Toccanier took a prominent part in this last and has given an account of it :

"On 26th January, 1855, says he, "M. Vianney's nephew arrived from Dardilly to entreat him to visit his father, who was on his death-bed. The good Curé said to me : 'I am going to see my brother, who is sick.' 'Monsieur le Curé, we will both go together.' 'My nephew will be with me ; it is very cold ; there is no need to inconvenience you.' I accompanied him to his room, pressed him to make a breakfast like one who is setting out on a journey, and a few minutes after a parishioner was at the door with a good carriage. M. le Curé got in ; his nephew, Brother Jérôme and myself took our places under the uneasy glances of the onlookers, who begged his blessing and wished him a prosperous journey and prompt return. Despite their concern the parish was confident when they saw him leave under such reliable escort.

"After a little M. Vianney began to feel fatigued. At Les Grandes Balmes he was very unwell, and said : 'I feel ill ; open the carriage.' We walked up the slope on foot ; the keen air affected him ; he began to shiver. We wanted to cut a stick for him from the hedge, but he refused to allow it, saying it would be a theft. He bought a staff from a passer-by, for which he paid forty sous. With much difficulty we made three or four kilometres and when we reached Parcieux M. le Curé was obliged to own that he could go no further. I promptly said : 'In that case I will go on to Dardilly with your nephew.' 'It will be doing me a great kindness if you will do so,' replied he. 'Ask my brother if he has anything special to say to me and give my regards to my sister.'

"So the carriage was turned round, M. le Curé continued for a short distance on foot ; then he and Brother Jérôme got in and started at a good pace to go back to Ars.

"At Neuville," continues M. Toccanier, "I obtained another carriage, but the roads were in such a poor condition that I did not reach my destination until nightfall. Next day, after seeing the sick man in private, I hastened to rejoin my holy Curé whom I had left so ill by the roadside. Brother Jérôme reported that immediately the carriage had turned round to go to Ars all the symptoms which had so much alarmed us disappeared ; that on his arrival M. Vianney resumed his work ; and that he had said night prayers at the usual time without any apparent fatigue.

There was an interesting episode on the return journey. Near Trévoux they met an omnibus going to Lyons full of pilgrims. When the latter recognised the holy priest they descended and, leaving their omnibus to continue its journey empty, escorted him into the village and entered the church with him.

“‘Among these pilgrims there were doubtless some old sinners,?’ said we. ‘Oh! yes, my friend; some of them had not made a confession for forty years.’ ‘You see, Monsieur le Curé, it must have been God Himself who prevented you going away, in order to recall you to the work that is so precious in His sight.’”

This was the third time that the Curé of Ars had found himself compelled to bow before the manifestations of the divine will. Eventually he came to understand that this desire for repose in solitude and prayer was a temptation; but one which repeated itself more or less vaguely under one form or another. He had much difficulty in repelling it completely and was often heard to repeat *that it was a fearful thing to pass straight from a cure of souls to the Judgment-seat of God*. Besides which it is quite certain that he would never have found the peace and seclusion he was in quest of. He would have fled from one retreat to another in vain. Wherever he might have hidden himself he would still have been tracked and beset by multitudes eager for consolation and instruction.

CHAPTER XXXVII

OF THE HONOURS RENDERED TO THE SANCTITY OF M. VIANNEY AND SOME NOTABLE VISITS RECEIVED BY HIM

I will be little in my own eyes : and . . . I shall appear more glorious. (II. Kings vi., 22.)

But to me thy friends, O God, are made exceedingly honourable : and their principality is exceedingly strengthened. (Ps. cxxxviii., 17.)

WE do not know of any man of this century who has enjoyed such a unique and universal renown as the Curé of Ars. This renown seems remarkable when one reflects that he had no other title to the admiration of his contemporaries beyond *eminent holiness, nor did any aureola encircle his brow than that of virtue. Further, this virtue if it was to impress the world must first pierce the veil of his simplicity—or, as he called it, his *ignorance*. Again, his simplicity—before it was consecrated by the gift of miracles, prophecy and infused qualities—might have appeared exaggerated and have produced an unfavourable effect. And when one recognised that in M. Vianney there was a re-incarnation of the prodigies of the finest ages of Christianity : and had been a close spectator of the precautions he never ceased to take to avoid all display and sensation, as well as the pain that every too direct and demonstrative mark of respect inflicted on his modesty, the fact of such an unparalleled celebrity appears more remarkable still. One ventures to believe that the moral perceptions of the peoples are not so profoundly enfeebled as they would appear to be, and that the presence of a few saints in our decadent society would avail to renew in it that faith which alone can save the world.

The strangers who came to Ars while the Curé was alive—whatever their convictions or station in society—one and all carried away the same impression with them. The heart is the last thing that dies in us ; and the heart is kept alive by admiration of the beautiful and love of things that are good. When the good and beautiful appear to us—wherever and under whatsoever form—they never fail to influence the heart. It feels, as did the heart of Elizabeth at the sight of our Blessed Lady, it is lifted up in presence of what is beautiful, it softens at the spectacle of that which is good ; and in the act of exaltation and softening it loves, venerates and is happy.

Every pilgrim to Ars beheld, if not with the eye of faith—for many had not such good fortune—at least with the respect that such an incontestable moral superiority could not fail to inspire, the spectacle of this miracle of self-conquest and apostolic charity.

Nor did they find it easy to tear themselves away from it. For the marvellous, the pathetic, the simple, the sublime—in a word, the epic grandeur of a race of men that has faded from human recollection, simple as children, strong as giants—were all found there. And the keener the intelligence of the beholder the greater was the effect produced in him.

We have heard a distinguished but rather sceptical savant say enthusiastically: "I believe that since the stable of Bethlehem the like has never been witnessed!" He was mistaken; he had not read the history of the Church; but he spoke correctly in this sense, viz., that the life of the Curé of Ars, like that of every saint, is a continuation of the life of our Lord—Bethlehem is their cradle. It was there that virtue had its birth; it was there that she appeared to us for the first time under the form of a little child; and from thence she, under the divine impulse, came forth to diffuse herself among the nations throughout the centuries.

A celebrated poet wished to make the acquaintance of the Curé of Ars and after having seen and heard him being wholly unable to restrain his emotion, he so far forgot himself as to say in his presence: "I have never seen God so near!" "True, my friend," interjected M. Vianney, pointing to the Blessed Sacrament exposed on the altar; "quite true. God is never very far off. We have Him yonder in the Sacrament of His love." And as the poet was proceeding to emphasise his original remark by expressions more and more appreciative the Curé took his hands in his own and interrupted him gently. "My friend, I love that saying of St. John: Did people only know us, they would say far less good about us and much more evil." The poet spoke of a church to which he was devoting his poems; and M. Vianney, whose conversation was always of heavenly things, said to him: "The material church will certainly be built; the most important thing is to rear a spiritual church in our hearts, a living tabernacle in which it will please our Lord to dwell." On leaving, after having received the benediction of the Curé of Ars, Jasmin said: "What a wonderful example of sanctity! This man is even greater than his repute! Never shall I forget that head already encircled with the aureola of the Blessed, that burning glance, that infantine simplicity!"

Marceau, the Missionary of the Seas, came to Ars on his return from his last voyage to the islands of the archipelago of Oceania. He was asked what he thought of the venerable Curé and whether he had found him learned. "As regards human learning, no," replied he, "but as regards the knowledge of things divine, oh! yes . . . The marvel that has struck me most is that in the Curé of Ars I have seen a child such as our Lord loved. He is one of the most beautiful examples of Christian childhood; that is why God is with him."

"Moved by all that I had heard," wrote a priest of very exceptional sanctity, "I resolved to go to see the Saint myself. On turning over the pages of the book containing my resolutions I find among the occasions which have influenced my life and which I have to remember with gratitude—the anniversary of my First Communion, conversion, ordination—the date 24th August, 1832, preceded by the words: Visit to Ars. It was then that I first set foot in the hallowed spot to which I have so often returned, in which I have shed such consoling tears, formed so many good resolutions, and the very name of which stirs me to the depths of my soul."

We shall not attempt to enumerate all the marks of confidence and tokens of love and veneration that M. Vianney received during the course of his apostolate. We have already said and everyone knows that for thirty years Ars was a centre for visits, requests, prayers and consultations, so much frequented that the glory of older places of pilgrimage was for the moment eclipsed. The list of eminent personages—magistrates, soldiers, literary men, religious, priests and bishops, who had been seen there is endless. One day we had the curiosity to turn over a few pages of the visitors' book at the hotel and found some of the most illustrious names of France, Belgium and England; notabilities from London, Dublin, Edinburgh, Brussels, Cologne, Munich; and even travellers from the banks of the Mississippi, the Ohio and La Plata.

One incident rather difficult to believe will show better than any words of ours the degree of celebrity which, thanks to its Curé, Ars had acquired. One day the postman brought us a letter which he was unable to deliver. It came from Naples, and the address, in mixed French and Italian, was to this effect:

"The Illustrious and Reverend Padre Colin,
Superior of the Society of Mary,
LYONS,
Near ARS."

The postal authorities at Trévoux naturally thought a mistake had been made and that the address should have been "Ars, near Lyons:" hence the attempt to deliver it at Ars. But Padre Colin lived at Lyons, as he had always done; his Italian correspondent was quite aware of the fact and yet wrote the address as he did.

We happen to know that in Rome the Curé of Ars was known by repute to most of the Cardinals, Members of the Congregations and Prelates who surrounded the Pontifical throne. Among the Princes of the Church whose presence at Ars was in itself a homage rendered to the humble priest by some of the most eminent members of the hierarchy we may mention their Lordships of Aix, Meaux, Autun, Valence, Basse-Terre, Birmingham; Mgr.

de Brésillac, Mgr. Guillemin, Mgr. Bataillon, etc. H.E. Cardinal de Bonald wished to make the acquaintance of M. Vianney. He had a long conference with him in his humble apartment and on leaving said to the Abbé Toccanier who attended him: "Do you know, Monsieur l'abbé, that the Curé of Ars has a wondrous insight into the most sublime spiritual truths?" A few days later His Eminence's chaplain sent the holy priest a beautiful rosary blessed by Pius IX. with the message: "Ars, home of the miraculous! . . . Though we have made no more than a passing acquaintance with it, its memory, keen and profound, remains with us . . . Perhaps one of these days our present happiness may be more fully realised. It is a pleasure to be able to hope for it."

Mgr. Dupanloup, the great Bishop of Orleans, came to Ars several times in quest of edification. He interviewed M. Vianney in the confessional and told his friends afterwards how the holy Curé had endeavoured to quiet his fears as to the responsibilities of his pastoral office by saying: "There are plenty of bishops in the Martyrology, but there are hardly any curés there. I have much more reason to tremble than you."

Mgr. Lyonnet on his way to take possession of the See of Valence came to ask the blessing of the servant of God. M. Vianney could not tolerate the idea of a bishop kneeling before him; but as his Lordship insisted he consented to make the sign of the Cross over him. Then falling on his own knees he said: "Monseigneur, this benediction ought to return upon myself."

On 31st May, 1845, the Curé of Ars had just brought the exercises of the month of May to a conclusion. The crowd of pilgrims had gathered round the door of the church, waiting for the appearance of their *Saint*, when a modest conveyance drove up, inside which was a priest enveloped in a black cloak. When a white habit was descried under the cloak there was a general cry: "It is the great preacher!" This was the name by which the countryside designated the man who had recently produced an unexampled impression in Lyons—Père Lacordaire. And next day the people of Ars were gratified by the spectacle of the illustrious Dominican attentively listening to the sermon of the Curé of Ars—genius seated at the feet of sanctity. M. Vianney himself was so touched that he remarked: "Do you know what it was that most struck me during the visit of Père Lacordaire? Well, it was that all that is greatest in learning had come to bow before all that is least in ignorance . . . The two extremes have met."

Père Lacordaire was intensely moved by the fervent exhortation in which he had heard the man of God conjure his parishioners to invoke the Holy Spirit and call down the plenitude of His gifts. He added that if he had had to discourse on the same

subject he would have done it, if not in the same terms, at least under the same inspiration. "This holy priest and I may not use the same language, but I am happy to bear witness that though we do not express ourselves alike we think and feel alike." The orator had heard the saint, but the saint desired to hear the orator. So he announced that at Vespers someone would preach who preached much better than himself. The Father hesitated at first, and only yielded under the consideration that to meet the wishes of the Curé of Ars would be the best mark of respect and submission he could show him. But he complained of having to speak instead of being allowed to listen once again. "I came here to seek counsel and edification," said he. He placed himself at the feet of the servant of God with such real humility and evident conviction that everyone of the parishioners felt that some part of the glory of their Saint was reflected upon himself. "Did you notice," said they to one another as they left the church, "did you notice how the great preacher bowed himself down before our Curé?"

The Curé of Ars appreciated to the full the faith and real greatness of soul by which the most famous Christian orator of his time was actuated; and tears would come to his eyes at the remembrance of Père Lacordaire earnestly entreating his benediction. The elevation of thought and harmony of diction of the great preacher charmed M. Vianney to enthusiasm. "I shall never dare to enter my pulpit after this," said he; "I feel like the prince who had lent his horse to the Pope and never ventured to mount it himself thereafter." Someone spoke in his presence of the prodigious effect of the Lyons Conferences; adding, however, that only a few conversions were remarked as resulting from them. "Listen," said he, "it will be an immense gain if the preacher has proved to the savants that there are things they have yet to learn and to our intellectuals that there are people more intellectual still . . . They must first be made to admire the beauty of the edifice if they are to have the desire to enter it."

Thus the effect of this memorable visit was both complete and reciprocal. The distinguished pilgrim was vastly edified by the marvellous sanctity of the Curé of Ars. He promised to come again and he kept his word. Without entering into the details of the private interview he had with M. Vianney he avowed that he had received from him not only luminous hints but very positive assurances with regard to the re-establishment of the Friars Preachers. Apropos of the lights he obtained from the Curé of Ars he remarked: "Science makes us feel a great void in life, but cannot fill it: holiness illuminates, elevates and satisfies it."

When the venerable Père Muard, founder of the Benedictines

of Pierre-qui-Vire, came to Ars his heart went out to that of the good Curé. The two great servants of God found themselves in accord on every point. They recognised one another as if by instinct, and a reciprocal attraction induced a mutual interchange of ideas between them.

One morning the missionary who had to say the five o'clock Mass found a venerable white-headed priest kneeling in the sacristy bathed in tears. The latter rose and embraced the missionary, exclaiming: "My God! what a man is here! How comes it that I have grown old without coming to see him! Oh! I will come again! I will come again!" And the Abbé Combalot*—for it was he—was not content to hear of the wonders of Ars; he repeated the sayings of the servant of God. In them he recognised the spirit of the saints, and his powerful memory, well stocked with the lore of St. Bernard and St. Bonaventure, suggested happy comparisons and interesting harmonies between the language of these great mystics and that of the Curé of Ars.

The pulpits of Paris and the provinces often resounded with the name of M. Vianney and his anticipated panegyric. Some years before his death Père Petetot preached at St. Sulpice, in honour of St. Charles, the patron of the seminary. He spoke of the glory of the saints and of what God does for those who give themselves unreservedly to Himself. Suddenly he interrupted the thread of his discourse to say, with emotion: "I have seen one Saint during my life; I have heard him exhort his people. All his eloquence consisted in this: 'My children, love the good God . . . He is so good! . . . Love Him with all your heart.' " Then, addressing himself to the seminarians seated in front of the pulpit, the venerable Oratorian continued: "Well, gentlemen, this Saint whom it is my good fortune to know converts more souls with those simple words than the rest of us will ever do with our elaborate discourses."

Were it not that we have to place some limitations on ourself, we could relate many another interesting gathering at Ars. Fathers brought their children there, Christian husbands their wives, head-masters their scholars, the superiors of religious communities their subjects and novices. The Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul made it the goal of their pilgrimages.

The Conference of Villefranche was founded by the lamented Comte Charles de Montbriant, who crowned a life of faith and good works by a death precious in the sight of God. By his entrance

* Combalot, the Abbé Théodore: a well-known preacher to whom was confided the first direction of the Sisters of the Assumption; and one of the original members of the *Congrégation de St. Pierre*, a religious society whose distinctive duty was the defence of the Church by study, teaching and spiritual direction. In 1844 he came into collision with the French Government in connexion with the controversy concerning the university.

into the family that the Curé of Ars loved M. de Montbriant also entered into the intimacy of the Curé of Ars himself. During his lifetime the holy man could refuse him nothing; but his respect hindered the latter from asking very much. Nevertheless, though it may cost a good deal to ask, it does not cost much to wish for a favour. The President of the Villefranche Conference had long desired to obtain the prayers and benedictions of the servant of God for his work. He wanted his colleagues of St. Vincent de Paul to assist at M. Vianney's Mass, receive Holy Communion from his hand, to be encouraged by his words; and then that an extraordinary conference should be held under his presidency. The missionary who was assisting at the pilgrimage at the moment entered into the project and undertook the small diplomacy necessary to carry it into effect. There was no need of artifice to obtain the intention of the good Curé's Mass. His humility perceived at once the bond that united him to the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul. "They are the friends of the poor," said he, "I am a poor man myself; I shall be in my proper place among them."

— But it was a more difficult matter to prevail on the worthy priest to preside at a meeting and receive some twenty-five or thirty of the most considerable persons of the district. It was necessary to scheme a little. Anything that would make him conspicuous was repugnant to the good Curé; besides which it would interfere with his regular habits; consequently nothing was said to him on the matter. But after Mass followed by a sermon from the missionary, after a fraternal agape given by the inhabitants of the chateau, after the catechism, in which the Curé of Ars surpassed himself—speaking with admirable appropriateness of the Christian employment of riches and garnishing his discourse with a host of charming illustrations and a more than charming naïvety—as he returned to the presbytery, he found the Conference gathered together in the courtyard in front of the house. He gave a start of surprise, then recovering himself and accompanying each word with his amiable smile, said: "Aha! the friends of the poor again! One comes across them everywhere to-day! The friends of the poor are the friends of the good God: it is a day snatched from paradise."

Then—without the least suspicion that it was all part of the programme, in which he was taking the rôle assigned to him—he commenced to talk easily and pleasantly of poverty, its dignity and its joys, introducing all sorts of delightful and little-known anecdotes of St. Francis of Assisi, St. John of God, and other devoted lovers of holy poverty. His hearers were so powerfully affected that after M. Vianney had ceased speaking and had given them his blessing, they lingered still—being unwilling to leave

the little courtyard where, as the good Curé had expressed it, paradise had opened to them for an instant on earth.

With regard to the homage paid to sanctity by the world at large, which makes some amends for its lapses by honouring those who condemn it, we might say a good deal on the remarkable manifestations that greeted the servant of God whenever he moved out of his confessional or the church. But we will content ourselves with saying that they were from one point of view the most striking and extraordinary scenes to be witnessed in the general tableau of Ars. We know a general who had accompanied M. de la Peyrouse, Préfet of the Department of the Ain, on a visit to the des Garets family. It was Sunday, and the guests of the chateau naturally attended all the religious services of the day. All the old soldier had seen thus far had not moved him in any marked degree. The Curé's catechism left him cold and inattentive. But when on leaving the church he witnessed the marks of veneration which attended the passing of the servant of God; when he saw the breathless multitude with bowed heads, uplifted arms, and gestures of entreaty, and the saintly old man addressing a word to all, smiling on all, bestowing his blessing on all, then tears came to his eyes and he was so much affected that for a long time he could talk of nothing else.

The ambition of the pilgrims was not to be satisfied by merely seeing the Curé of Ars, speaking to him and obtaining a reply to their questions; they wanted to have a souvenir of him—something he had blessed, a picture he had signed, anything that had belonged to him. Thence had arisen his custom—which cost his humility a continual effort—of blessing articles of piety, writing his initials on pictures or in books, which were presented to him after Mass every day for the purpose.

At one time when the Curé of Ars quitted the church for a moment he used to take off his surplice and leave it on the wall of the cemetery, to be resumed on his return. This practice had to be abandoned—the surplice was carried off piecemeal. Thenceforth Curé and surplice never parted company. The same happened to his hat, which during his long sittings in the confessional he was unable to defend against the depredations of these pious vandals. Consequently he gave up wearing a hat altogether. Many attacks were made on his soutane by individuals armed with scissors. When he gave his catechism from the choir, women would actually glide behind his stall and endeavour to cut off locks of his hair. For the most part—despite his inward suffering—he would feign to be unaware of what was going on; but when the ladies pulled too hard he would turn round and say, quietly: "Leave me alone!" Pages were very often torn out of his breviary; and so he had to keep it out of sight of the pilgrims. Useless to mention the avidity with which they contended for

possession of any article he had used or even merely touched. The scanty movables of his room were all sold times without number. Never did we venture to show strangers over the presbytery without having to account for some loss or damage afterwards. They pulled the straw out of his bed, chipped his chairs, took splinters from his table, destroyed his books, opened his drawers in search of his pens, pencils and paper, which they carried off as treasures. When no other booty was to be had they broke off branches from the clump of elders which overhung the courtyard. The more discreet contented themselves with picking one of the little flowers that grew among the grass.

Those who were unable to enjoy the actual presence of the Curé of Ars wanted to possess his portrait. This found its way everywhere. We have found it in the cottages of primitive Switzerland; among the peasants of Uri and Unterwalden. The continual exhibition of this portrait exposed for sale in every variety and not seldom under the most ridiculous forms at every door in the village offended the sight of the good Curé and wounded his soul. In the beginning it was a veritable obsession for him. In the end he became accustomed to it—as to so many other sufferings. But it was remarked that, when he passed from the presbytery to the church, pursued by the ovations of the crowd, he did so with bowed head and seemed not to know what to do with his eyes. If he chanced inadvertently to notice one of these pictures that garnished the walls he would pass over the unwelcome sight with an amiable sally: “Always that wretched portrait! See how unhappy I am! They exhibit me, they sell me! Poor Curé of Ars!”

At the sight of one of these caricatures, more grotesque and highly-coloured than usual, he said, gaily: “There! look at that now! Wouldn’t you say that I had just come out of the cabaret?”

In 1852 an artist from Avignon, struck by the air of sanctity so very apparent in the features of the Curé of Ars, had succeeded in producing from memory a sufficiently satisfactory likeness of the holy man. This was before the appearance of the really remarkable work of Cabuchet. It was reproduced by lithography and sold for two or three francs a copy. On seeing this fresh edition of his portrait M. Vianney remarked, with the malicious little smile with which he was accustomed to season any pungent reflection: “Alas! one gets reminded at every step of how little one is really worth. When I could be had for a couple of *sous* purchasers were to be found; now the price has gone up to five francs buyers are to seek.”

Never had the holy man consented to fall in with the wishes of the various artists, painters and photographers who, at one time and another, came to Ars in the hope of being allowed to

make a study of him and reproduce his features. When M. Cabuchet came he endeavoured to prepare the ground beforehand by getting Mgr. Chalandon to write a letter insisting that his good Curé should consent to sit to the artist. M. Vianney was inflexible; but he only replied: "Willingly, provided that Monseigneur will allow me to escape directly afterwards." There was no danger of Monseigneur giving any such permission. Reduced to the same straits as his predecessors, the young artist set himself none the less courageously to his task. He daily assisted at the catechism, hidden among the crowd, assumed an air of extreme attention and made a wax model in the crown of his hat.

Émilien Cabuchet is an artist of the Christian school—one of those who prays before he works. He had not been two days at Ars before he felt the desire to make his confession to the good Curé. "Take care you don't betray yourself then or let him suspect what has brought you here," said the missionary. "Your penance would be to destroy your model."

Despite this caution the pious artist could not resist the temptation to tell M. Vianney that he was the designer of the statue of St. Vincent de Paul recently erected at Châtillon. The good Curé graciously made his felicitations. Then M. Cabuchet found courage to say: "Father, I should like to produce yet another work in which our Lord may be known and glorified in His saints." M. Vianney understood perfectly what was intended, and replied in a severe tone: "No, my friend, no! Neither for you nor for Monseigneur will I ever consent to it."

After this interview the Curé of Ars, on giving his customary catechism, recognised his penitent who, to obtain a better view, had esconced himself directly in front of him. He leaned over towards him and said, sweetly: "Come! come! my friend, you have been here too long giving distractions to me and everyone else." This address went near disconcerting the patient modeller; but happily the work was well-advanced. Nevertheless, he thought it best to disappear discreetly for a few days. But when he thought the Curé of Ars had had time to forget him he resumed operations.

"My friend," said the good *Saint*, on finding him back at his post, "have you nothing at all to do at home then?"

"Monsieur le Curé, one would think that you wanted to turn me out!"

"No, my friend, but I have a great desire to excommunicate you."

"What crime have I committed then?"

"That's good! That's good! You know very well. You have been distracting me all the morning."

"It has been one of the great happinesses of my life to have known the Curé of Ars," said Émilien Cabuchet afterwards. "One must have seen saints to be able to paint them."

We will only make passing mention of the *camail** that M. Vianney received from Mgr. Chalandon, and the Cross of Honour awarded to him at the request of the Comte Emmanuel de Coëtlogon, Préfet of the Ain, on the report of the Marquis de Castellane, Sous-Préfet of Trévoux. The good Curé only wore his *camail* once—at the ceremony of reception, which was a grievous mortification to him. As to the Cross of Honour: in order to be able to say he had accepted it they had to affect to believe that it might be a present of relics. "Oh dear!" said he, with a sigh of disappointment, as he opened the case containing it; "nothing but that, after all!" Then, passing it to M. Toccanier: "Take it, my friend; the Emperor has made a mistake. Have as much pleasure in receiving it as I have in giving it to you."

Some days later the Préfet of the Ain having come to congratulate the newly-made Chevalier, the Curé of Ars said to him: "You would have done better to confer this decoration on someone more worthy of it." "That would have been difficult," replied M. de Coëtlogon, courteously. "If the Emperor has given you the Cross, Monsieur le Curé, it is not to honour you, but to honour the Legion of Honour itself." (See Correspondence A, at the end of this chapter).

Before closing this chapter we may notice that remarkable discussion anent the servant of God which seems to belong to a bygone age, and to resemble one that followed on the death of one of the greatest saints of France—St. Martin. The general decay of faith in our time and country did not prevent the people of Dardilly looking with the eye of envy on the treasure possessed by Ars; and they cast about for the means of securing at least a part of it for themselves. So they waited on M. Vianney and besought him to make his will. They knew well enough that he never retained even the smallest portion of the considerable sums of money which the piety of the faithful entrusted to him. They wanted something much more precious than gold or silver—the bequest of his mortal remains to his native parish. The good Curé, who never refused any favour in his power to grant, made no difficulty, and the will was made as desired. But the secret transpired and great was the alarm, not only in Ars but throughout the diocese of Belley. The Bishop thought it his duty to intervene. He demanded of M. Vianney the reason for his desire to leave after his death the diocese he had served so well during life; and why it was he wished his body to rest at Dardilly. "Ah!" said the good Curé, "provided my soul is with God, what does it matter where my poor body lies?"

But Mgr. Chalandon claimed the poor body, and the Curé, abashed at the stir over what he considered so small a matter,

**Camail*: purple cape, edged with ermine, worn by canons of a cathedral chapter.

promised to make another will. This he did the day before he died, definitely bequeathing his remains to the parish of Ars. But Dardilly would not accept defeat and prepared to take further measures. And—strange as it may appear in this nineteenth century—the notables of the district opened a subscription to uphold what they called their rights. They made appeal to divers authorities and at one time thought to carry their cause. They desired at least a part of this treasure ; and it was only with great difficulty they could be brought to hear reason. (See Correspondence B, at the end of this chapter). Throughout the proceedings the disquiet at Ars was at its height. Perhaps their imagination was unduly excited ; but fearing lest some attempt should be made upon it, they thought it necessary to mount guard over the tomb of the servant of God after his death.

These incidents illustrate the popular feeling better than anything we could say ; and give some indication of the respect and confidence of which the marvellous man whose history we are writing was the object, both during his lifetime and after his death.

CORRESPONDENCE

A

From the Marquis de Castellane, Sous-Préfet of Trévoux, to the Préfet of the Department of the Ain.

Trévoux, 28th June, 1856.

Monsieur le Préfet,

There resides in a little commune of my district, the population of which numbers some five hundred souls, a Curé who by his eminent piety and evangelic sanctity has acquired a European reputation.

However vague this indication may appear, the name of M. Vianney, Curé of Ars, at once suggests itself.

The Commune of Ars, formerly altogether insignificant among the communes of my district, to-day attracts a prodigious multitude of pilgrims. Two omnibuses run from Lyons to Ars every day. Two others meet the trains from Paris to Lyons at Villefranche twice daily. A fifth conveyance passes through and stops at Ars on its way from Villefranche to Villars. The number of travellers who make the pilgrimage to Ars amounts to twenty thousand annually ; and they come from all parts of France and Europe.

This concourse, which has continued for many years and is entirely due to the reputation for sanctity of one humble priest, is nothing short of a prodigy in an age that has inherited doctrines not only anti-religious but hostile to the Christian faith. The confidence of the people in M. le Curé of Ars is unbounded—it is

the evangelic faith that moves mountains. In addition sundry occurrences might be quoted very difficult of explanation by any natural means. It were impossible to detail them within the limits of a letter. Suffice it to say here that there is no suspicion of charlatanism attaching to the proceedings of the venerable Curé of Ars.

M. Vianney is a man of admirable simplicity and most profound humility. He is a second St. Vincent de Paul, whose charity brings wonderful things to pass. He is a modern apostle who with boundless devotion and self-abnegation endeavours to accomplish two objects—the glory of God and the good of his neighbour. The material benefits, which are but the accessories of his ministry, are, nevertheless, very considerable. Several most useful foundations owe their origin to his zeal. Thus he has established a *Providence* at Ars, as also a free school conducted by Brothers. In like manner he has helped to found establishments of the same nature in the neighbouring communes. The priests and poorer churches look to him as to a second Providence. Even from the merely material point of view he appears as a man of eminent usefulness.

Among all the clergy of my district he is incontestably the one who has the best title to an honorary distinction. It is extremely desirable that such should be conferred by the Government. There is reason to fear that his humility may prevent his acceptance of it. But whether or no, it will always be regarded as a well-deserved recognition, not only of the clergy but also of the spirit of religion generally.

Consequently, Monsieur le Préfet, I have the honour to beg that on the approaching *fête* of his Majesty you will be pleased to submit the name of M. Vianney, Curé of Ars, for admission to the grade of Chevalier of the Imperial Order of the Legion of Honour.

Be pleased to accept; etc.,

The Sous-Préfet,
Marquis J. DE CASTELLANE.

From the Bishop of Belley to the Marquis de Castellane.

Belley, 3rd July, 1856.

Monsieur le Marquis,

I have been extremely touched by the honourable initiative you have taken in submitting the name of the venerable Curé of Ars as a prospective recipient of the decoration of the Legion of Honour. In my opinion its bestowal would be a noble homage on the part of the Government to humble and self-effacing virtue. I have written to M. le Préfet in the same sense as yourself. Whether the recommendation be accepted or not, I shall always

remember the part you have taken with gratitude ; and I believe, Monsieur le Sous-Préfet, that God and man will be alike gratified that you should thus have endeavoured to do public honour to the excellent priest who seeks only to remain unknown.

I remain, Monsieur le Marquis, with great consideration,

Your very humble servant,

GEORGES,

Bishop of Belley.

B

Letter from the Comte des Garets, Maire of Ars, to the Bishop of Belley, with reference to the claim put forward by the inhabitants of Dardilly to the eventual possession of the body or part of the body of the venerable M. Vianney.

Monseigneur,

I had no time yesterday to discuss in detail the objections which, to my thinking, absolutely invalidate the claim put forward by the inhabitants of Dardilly.

The first of these objections is the formal desire of M. Vianney, expressed in his will, that his mortal remains should always repose at Ars—a desire previously manifested by a declaration, written entirely by himself, of 10th October, 1855. It is my duty to carry out his wishes—a duty both personal and official and I shall endeavour to fulfil it to the letter.

Another objection, Monseigneur, is the actual position of the coffin. It lies in a vault closed by enormous stones overlaid with cement and some twenty centimetres (about eight inches) of mortar and the marble slab bearing the inscription. A whole day's work would not suffice to undo what has been done. The coffin would have, with immense labour, to be raised up into the church and the oak and lead shells opened in order to expose the venerated remains. The inhabitants of Dardilly have no right to expect such an undertaking. On the day of the funeral I promised them that later, when the exhumation of the body should be possible, they should have a notable relic thereof. They ought to have been content with that promise and not press a demand which, all things considered, seems unbecoming and not inspired by real devotion. As the old friend of the holy priest, in my capacity of Maire of Ars, I must ever oppose such a violation alike of his wishes and his tomb.

In the Commune of Ars, too, there would be very serious opposition and it might become very disquieting. On the death of M. Vianney a rumour spread that people were coming from Dardilly to carry off his body. I can gauge the force of this opposition and foresee what would happen were these rumours realised.

Finally, Monseigneur, M. Vianney lived at Ars for forty-two years. There it was that he became known. It was at Ars that he converted, consoled and cured thousands of pilgrims; and there it was that so many have been edified by his marvellous sanctity and experienced the benefits of a charity that knew no bounds. It was at Ars then that he lived, prayed and wept. It was at Ars that the voice of the people acclaimed him as a Saint. And there it is that he desired his mortal remains to rest. And yet the people of Dardilly, ignoring his clearly-expressed wishes and the respect and veneration already manifested at his tomb, would have that tomb opened and possess themselves of what they have no title to. This claim seems to me as exorbitant as it is misplaced.

Here then, Monseigneur, are the objections which I should wish to be able to develop more completely. Your own feelings will lead you to realise their importance. I venture to hope that if any difficulty arises you will sustain and protect us. Encouraged by your support in a cause both holy and just, I shall go forward with my mission to the end—a mission which has become the principal object of my life and which to-day is both its consolation and hope.



From a Painting by M. Borel, of Lyons.

Villand-Vernu, Phot., Aix (Ain).

The Curé on his way from the Church to the Presbytery.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

HOW THE MULTITUDE OF PILGRIMS SOUGHT COUNSEL OF M. VIANNEY

He that possesseth justice, shall lay hold on her. And she will meet him as an honourable mother, and will receive him as a wife married of a virgin. With the bread of life and understanding, she shall feed him, and give him the water of wholesome wisdom to drink : and she shall be made strong in him, and he shall not be moved : And she shall hold him fast, and he shall not be confounded : and she shall exalt him among his neighbours. And in the middle of the church she shall open his mouth, and shall fill him with the spirit of wisdom and understanding . . . And he will pour forth the words of his wisdom as showers, and in his prayer he will confess to the Lord. And he shall direct his counsel, and his knowledge, and in his secrets shall he meditate . . . Many shall praise his wisdom. (Ecclus. xv., 1-5 ; xxxix., 9-10-12)

ONE might almost apply to the Curé of Ars that passage in the homilies of St. John Chrysostom, in which the great commentator on St. Paul shows us in his figurative language the Apostle of the Gentiles directing the world as a captain directs a ship : rescuing those who have fallen overboard, comforting those who are sea-sick, encouraging the sailors, sometimes at the stem, at others at the stern, weighing the anchor, trimming the sails, working at the oars, keeping an eye on the weather, combining the duties of ship-master and pilot, putting his hand to everything in order to relieve others. (*Hom. xxv., in II. Cor.*). He was—to use the comparison of St. Francis of Sales—like one of those great public fountains at which everybody is at liberty to drink. When a difficult situation arose people came to seek light and counsel at Ars. Many who had only a few words to say to the holy priest gave up the attempt to make their way through the impenetrable crowd which fenced his confessional and watched for an opportunity to seize upon him as he passed in or out.

One of the most extraordinary and moving spectacles to be seen was that of the Curé of Ars making his way every day at noon from the presbytery to the former house of the *Providence*, now the home of the missionaries, accompanied by the homage, greetings, and general attentions of the crowd. This was the moment when those who had not been able to see and speak to him so far endeavoured to approach him.

Directly he appeared every head was uncovered, every voice acclaimed his name, all arms were extended towards him, everyone wished to be noticed by him. His presence dominated everything, made everyone forget all besides. Their looks and thoughts were rivetted on that person, transfigured by penance, contem-

plation and the ardours of divine love. There was the same desire to approach him as was witnessed in the case of the most illustrious saints, and notably in that of St. Dominic, who could never show himself without being followed by persons of every rank; and these deemed themselves happy to be able to touch him and cut fragments from his robe, to be preserved as relics. The same happened to M. Vianney. But he—protected by his humility and as if all these marks of veneration had been addressed to someone else—went his way without appealing to be affected by all that was done or said under his own eyes, attentive only to the questions which poured in upon him.

And such questions! Here are a few we have heard ourselves:—

“Father, my mother is very ill. Some say she is incurable, others that there is some hope for her. Which am I to believe? . . .” “Father, I have a relation who is threatened with blindness. Ought we to try an operation? . . .” “Father will my daughter get well? . . .” “Will my husband be converted? . . .” “Will my children be saved? . . .” “Father, my health is not sufficiently good to undertake any business single-handed; will the good God provide me with an assistant? I have heard of a person with whom I could get on well enough. Should I take him into partnership? . . .” “Father, ought I to increase the number of my workmen? . . .” “Should I change my servant? . . .” “Would it be best to sell my property? . . .” “Ought I to retire from business? . . .” “Should I purchase this factory? . . .” “Ought I to go and live in the country?”

“Father, tell me the college in which my son will be best placed as to soul and body . . .” “My son has just taken his degree. What career should he follow? . . .” “My son wishes to enter the railway service. Will this be for his good? . . .” “Father, a gentleman has asked my daughter in marriage. Ought I to give my consent? . . .” “There is question of my son’s marriage; the young lady is eligible, but there is a difficulty about her dowry. Should I say Yes or No?”

“Father, ought we to believe in La Salette? . . .” “Can one believe in the miracle of Rimini? . . .” “What is to be thought of *l’Ermite des montagnes*? . . .” “What are we to think concerning Louis XVII?”

“Father, what are we to think of such or such a manner of dress?”

This last question was put very frequently. The dignity of our subject forbids the reproduction of a letter in which the writer asked his opinion of a certain fashion which then threatened to become prevalent. The matter was treated at length and with a gravity which vastly amused M. Vianney. “Poor ladies!” said he, speaking of the tyranny of this fashion, “they drag

mountains about with them ; they incommode themselves and they incommode others. They have done well to make the streets broader, but they will soon have to widen the doors . . . Poor ladies ! they suffer in this life with their fashions, only to have to suffer in the other !”

When the questions were idle, indiscreet, or wounding to his humility, he evinced his disapproval by a reply gently ironical.

“ Father,” said a lady to him, “ I have been here three days and haven’t been able to speak to you yet !” “ In paradise ! my child ; we will talk in paradise.”

“ Father,” said another, “ I have travelled two hundred leagues to see you.” “ It was not worth while to come so far for that.”

“ Father, I have not been able to see you yet !” “ You have not lost much then.”

“ Father, only one word !” “ My child, you have already spoken twenty.”

“ Father, is my husband in purgatory ?” “ I have never been there.”

“ Father, I would like you to tell me what is my vocation !” “ Your vocation, my child, is to save your soul.”

“ Oh ! Father, I have such a fear of hell !” “ Those who fear hell run less risk of going there than those who do not.”

“ Father, I am very slothful and wicked.” “ When people address such severe reproaches to themselves it is a proof that they will endeavour not to deserve them.”

— Sometimes he would divine by that supernatural intuition of which we shall speak in its proper place that it was not truth that was sought, but merely the gratification of self-love or curiosity. Then he became more dry and severe.

“ Father,” said a young woman, otherwise very pious, but in whom he discerned worldly sentiments and a leaning towards egoism, “ tell me where I should enter to make my noviciate—with the Ladies of the Nativity or with the Ladies of the Sacred Heart ? I should prefer the former, because they know me.” “ Alas !” was M. Vianney’s comment, “ they don’t know anything very great then !” The poor young woman withdrew in some confusion for the moment ; but a great light dissipated the mists of self-love afterwards and she saw that the only thing to be considered in the matter of vocation is the glory of God.

An importunate female—and heaven knows there were enough of them—had harassed the holy Curé for days ; she waylaid him at every turn, only to repeat the same story and one that he knew by heart. At length he said to her, with the benevolent smile which robbed the remark of its sting ; “ My child, in which month of the year do you talk least ?” Then, as the victim bit her lip and replied that she did not know, he continued : “ I

think it must be February, because that is a day or two shorter than the others."

The good Curé was known to strangers from all parts of the world as *mon Père, le bon Père, le saint Père*, indiscriminately. They understood that this affectionate and time-honoured mode of address was the one that best expressed the feelings to which his presence gave rise. He who has renounced paternity of blood in order to exercise by the fecundity of sacrifice a yet more glorious paternity of souls is well-deserving of this gracious and consoling title. And so *le bon Père* lent himself with the best grace in the world to every demand of the crowd however exacting it might be. Never did any interrogation—provided it was not altogether absurd and ridiculous—remain unanswered. Nothing could be clearer or more prompt than his replies. Indeed they were sometimes forthcoming before the matter in hand had been completely explained. This fact was the more remarkable because the Curé of Ars was as modest as he was conscientious and was, moreover, often called upon to deal with the gravest interests and resolve the most important difficulties.

He excelled in dragging each question out of the twilight in which self-love and self-interest regarded it, in order to see it better in the clear light of day: the daylight of a saintly soul—eternity. Moreover, after having listened to what he said—whether aloud or under his breath—one was always certain to recognise some new aspect of the truth, something one had not previously heard, something coming from the inner consciousness of a man who sought nothing but God. This lucidity was not invariably imparted to him in equal measure; he was only the instrument of the divine graces and these graces varied according to the good faith of his questioners. The compassion of God illuminated him on behalf of those in good faith and granted him the light of which they were in search.

Ordinarily he advised a novena to the Holy Ghost or the Holy Heart of Mary for the necessities of the soul and one to St. Philomena for those of the body.

Whoever brought real necessities to Ars combined with a sincere desire to obtain lights and graces, obtained these lights and graces in due proportion of need and desire. But once the light had shone forth the seeker had to accept it as it was vouchsafed. Many seeking only themselves, willing to make only such sacrifices as pleased them, became obstinate, waited, returned to the charge and insisted on receiving a decision that should satisfy their vanity, correspond to their ambitious desires or to the real or fancied necessities attaching to them. Some indeed seemed to wish to monopolise the holy man with all his graces and privileges. These triflers of the pilgrimage obtained nothing but what was vague and evasive: where M. Vianney either did not answer at

all, or if he did his reply diffused no light. The same happened to them as to the too importunate beggar. The rich man whom he pursues with his solicitations and who has already shown himself generous to him turns on him with: "I have nothing more for you."

All these interviews were made opportunities of either giving good advice or suggesting pious thoughts on the part of the servant of God. While the sermoniser did not appear, the master was very evident; but his friendly utterances, so appropriate to each, found their way to the heart and planted therein the seed of higher and better things. One was vanquished before one had time to prepare one's defences. The saints—who knew the power of a word said in the name of Jesus Christ, even to those who ignore the gentle Master—have ever regarded themselves as messengers sent by Him to every creature they encountered, and have ever striven never to leave him or her without having deposited at least the germ of salvation. M. Vianney possessed the art of saying things that were never afterwards forgotten. Frequently a single word of his sufficed to instil both truth and life into a soul.

Just as a seed cast by the wayside blooms into a beautiful flower or perchance a magnificent tree, so it sometimes happened that a very simple word from him—a word one had heard a hundred times before without remark; a word one would hardly have noticed if uttered by another—this word dropped in seemingly passing conversation on the soil of good will and nourished by reflection blossomed into the serious consideration of a whole course of life and eventuated into a solid conversion. This word struck at the root of the evil or arrested its progress; it dispelled the charm of error and pointed out the truth; it either closed sores of long standing or prescribed the most efficacious remedies to remedy their consequences. It may be that the word of the Curé of Ars had more unction in it or was more direct than the words of others; but it was always the word that the necessities of the case required, and rarely failed to hit its mark. Only God knows all that passed in these casual interviews and how much was effected for His service and His glory in those secret confidences by which the holy Curé paved the way for the change of heart which resulted in the still more secret confidences of the confessional.

It was impossible that the extreme diffidence that M. Vianney had in his own powers, his absolute detachment from the sway of his own feelings, and his humility of spirit, should not be rewarded by a celestial prudence and discernment. Many a time did it happen that several persons would find themselves in consultation with him, each of whom had a great desire to serve our Lord in the most perfect manner. Then a remarkable thing would ensue; he would advise this one to enter religion, that one to marry

and the other to remain single without quitting the world. And the event proved that each in following his counsel had hearkened to the voice of God.

A young woman after a serious illness had made a vow of perpetual virginity. Thereafter she was sought in marriage with much persistence, and, not being conscious of any signs of a vocation in herself was on the point of yielding. The Curé of Ars declared that nothing could compensate for the gift she had made of herself to Jesus Christ and which had been accepted by Him. He further declared that if she failed in her obligations by entering the married state she would be unhappy in it. He finished by advising that she should at least make a trial of the religious life. After much hesitation the young woman selected the noviciate of St. Joseph ; she entered there, she persevered and later on became an excellent religious.

Another young person came to consult the Curé of Ars about her vocation. "Be so good as to listen to me for a moment," she had said ; "I will accept your decision as from the Holy Spirit and will do as you direct." "It is well, my daughter," replied he ; "even though I should not give the best advice, God will bless your obedience."

"You must know then, Father, that at the age of ten I was sent to school with the Sisters of St. Charles. During my retreat preparatory to First Communion I felt an overwhelming desire to become a religious in a cloistered order. I would like to carry out what I believe to be the will of God, but my family are opposed to it. Their refusal has disgusted me with life. I find myself unhappy. I become impatient with those who place obstacles in my way. But there are times when it seems to me that my desires are only so many illusions of the devil, who inspires them only to trouble me and make me offend God."

"Poor child ! It is indeed God who calls you ; and I think you will be a religious some day ; but it must be with the consent of your parents. You must not disobey them. If you leave them against their wishes there will be no need to turn you out of the convent ; you will come out of your own accord. More than that, you will cause such grief to your father and mother that they will die—so much are they attached to you ! In every household there is a spoilt child—one who is more loved than the others. Well now ! you are the spoilt child of the family in this instance. You must remain with your parents as long as they live. The day you leave everything will be topsy-turvy at home."

The young person followed the counsel of the holy Curé. After having been the stay of her aged parents, the solace of their declining years, the angel of the domestic fireside and the kindly bond of union between the family, she became the spouse of Jesus Christ. She is happy under the veil and her sanctification proceeds apace.

The mother of a family came one day from the far side of Provence to conjure the servant of God to obtain the conversion of her son, whose medical studies had led him completely astray. The young man, who was gifted with considerable ability, was then working at a book on the cerebral functions, in which the existence of the soul was entirely denied. The holy Curé was much touched at the piety which had inspired this pilgrimage, and promised the Christian mother that her son should not write for very long. He told her not to bring the young man to Ars, because in his present state of incredulity he would find the supernatural atmosphere of the place intolerable. Then taking her aside : " My daughter," said he, " come here and attend to what I say. What will convert your son will be the sanctity of your own life ! Sanctity, you understand, without pause and without rest . . . Take care to advance ever farther and ever higher !"

A professor at a Lesser Seminary wrote to the missionary at Ars, under date of 6th April, 1856 : " I have great need of speech with your *Saint* ; but I have only one day at disposal—Pentecost Sunday. It would be very annoying to make a long, expensive and tiring journey and fail in my object at the end of it. Can I be certain of seeing M. Vianney, and at what time ?"

This young ecclesiastic arrived at Ars at the time appointed. He had travelled a hundred leagues for an interview of three minutes. We saw him afterwards. He had descended from Thabor : his face was radiant. " What a man !" he exclaimed. " Your Saint decided a question that nobody had been able to settle before—and in two words. He has quieted all my uncertainties."

The head of one of the diocesan establishments, who had already effected a great deal of good and seemed likely to effect much more, arrived one day. He had been dismayed to see a new college opened quite close to, and this appeared to threaten the future of his own house. He now inquired of the servant of God whether he should abandon the work. " No, my friend," replied M. Vianney, graciously, " our Lord has still work for you to do. You must only say with Him : Suffer the little children to come unto me." The prediction was fulfilled and the establishment continued to prosper.

A priest said to us : " The Curé of Ars stupefied me this evening by the foresight, clearness and promptitude of his replies to two personal and very important questions I put to him."

" Monsieur le Curé," said I, " when I leave this I want to go to the noviciate at Flavigny to make a retreat."

" Yes, my friend, you will do well. Oh ! if I could only follow you there !"

" Supposing the good God were to tell me to stay there and take the habit of St. Dominic ?"

"No, my friend, that is an alien desire. Remain as you are."

"Don't you think that our Lord will ask an account of me of a good desire coming from Him and which I have refused to carry into execution?"

"No," said M. Vianney, resolutely; "you are where God would have you to be. In remaining in that position there will always be more good to be done than you will be able to do."

"Monsieur le Curé, give me your blessing, to the end that I may always know the Lord's will and do it."

"May that blessing, my friend, *ever urge you on and restrain you!*"

A person came to Ars to seek enlightenment from M. Vianney on a case of conscience touching a matter of succession. The question was difficult and complicated. The servant of God gave an immediate reply, then, seeing that it had not carried conviction to his consultant, he asked permission to refer the matter to a conference of ecclesiastics that day assembled at Ars. This was done and, as most of them differed from him M. Vianney, according to his custom, placed the affair in the hands of the Bishop. The episcopal council approved his decision, and Mgr. Devie, in his reply, asked that it might be communicated to the consultant, so as to remove all disquiet on the subject.

A Curé of the diocese of Autun was called upon to solve a case of justice and restitution of a very intricate nature. He had done everything in his power to obtain light on the matter; read, reflected, consulted, all to no purpose—his doubts still persevered. He presented himself at Ars, where his problem was solved out of hand. M. Vianney only said one word, but that word so simple and peremptory no one had said before in connexion with the case, nor had he found it in any treatise on the subject; and yet it met the whole difficulty. It threw such a vivid light on the most obscure part of the question that this consultant of the Curé of Ars could not help remarking to himself: "Well! you certainly have someone who counsels you!" Out loud he added: "Where did you make your theology, Monsieur le Curé?" M. Vianney silently pointed to his *prie-dieu*.

"I have frequently been asked," said a reliable witness to us, "to be the mouth-piece of pilgrims with M. le Curé, and ask him questions in their name. I can aver that every time I have consulted M. Vianney, even on the most thorny and embarrassing questions, his replies have always come direct from God."

These replies were brief and concise. The Curé of Ars arrived at surprising conclusions by the simplest and most ordinary reflections. Without explanations or deductions, he merely said: "The good God wishes you to act in such a manner." Sometimes his conclusions were found to differ from those of people who were considered masters in the knowledge of the ways

of God. Without attempting to explain this contradiction, we may say that the event nearly always justified M. Vianney and that after mature reflection one had to come round to his opinion.

It cannot be alleged that this accurate grasp of the situation, this rapid appreciation of detail and correct sense of proportion on the part of the Curé of Ars were due to any great natural perspicacity or to his early education. Still less can they be set down to the account of systematic reading, studies seriously made, prolonged reflection or acquired knowledge. Rather did the essential Truth itself seem to dwell in the spirit of the humble priest—a latent but infallible criterion; a key that served him to open the most secret and carefully-guarded recesses of the heart; a clue wherewith to guide himself through the labyrinth of the human conscience; a chord that vibrated in unison with all that was right and just and found itself out of harmony with everything evil and untrue.

We may recall here the saying of Mgr. Devie: "The Curé of Ars may not be learned, but he is enlightened." Light is a gift; our eyes behold the brilliancy of the sun, but they do not create it. The most lucid intelligence does no more than receive the light of truth. Many who have this light obscure it by that reflection of self known as pride—a baneful medium which intercepts the splendours from on high and casts a shadow on the soul. Freedom and purity of heart are indispensable conditions. "Every passion," says the Angel of the Schools (St. Thomas), "warps as far as it can rectitude of judgment and takes away the power of giving sound advice." In the heart of M. Vianney was neither pride, ambition, or avarice, and consequently neither tenacity nor weakness. He pursued no fitful glimmerings of the imagination; he was unfettered by the tyranny of the senses. He possessed that clearness and justness of outlook which go to form purity of intention, and which the Holy Spirit Himself rates higher than the experience born of years. "I have had understanding above ancients: because I sought thy commandments." (Ps. cxviii., 100). In each and every decision reason was his law and the will of God his light. Nothing keeps the foot so sure and confirms us in the right way as the fact that we have nothing in our heart save truth and justice. "The law of his God is in his heart, and his steps shall not be supplanted." (Ps. xxxvi., 31).

Side by side with ordinary matters that concerned private interests alone, M. Vianney was called upon to decide far graver questions. Thanks to the presence of *le bon Père*, Ars had long been the laboratory in which the genius of faith and charity prepared and consecrated her beneficent schemes. Who can say how many Catholic works have come to birth there? Or how many others have there been baptised and confirmed?

From all sides came appeals for the approval of the holy

priest, for his blessing on and prayers in behalf of new foundations, communities, writings, institutions, on works sometimes destined to become widely celebrated. God manifested His sovereign power through him. At a word from him all things came to pass—those he proposed, those he wished, those he asked for. He decided a vocation, caused a monastery to be built, or a school, a *Providence*, an asylum, a hospital to spring up as if out of the ground.

— His marvellous good sense perceived at the first glance the difficulties of an enterprise, the arguments for and against it. He was pitiless in his rejection of projects that were unrealisable, without evident utility, those that came from indiscreet zeal, private caprice, desire for advertisement, as well as those that were the offspring of misdirected activity or an undisciplined mind. But his warmest sympathy ever went out to and his most efficacious assistance was ever at the service of works entered upon with a pure intention and the object of which was genuinely Christian. His hand can be traced—by inspiration, counsel, prayers, benedictions, alms—in most of the works of his time. He congratulated the founders, thanked them for their pains, rejoiced at the merit they were laying up for themselves, treated them with special consideration, encouraged and fortified them against the disenchantments and disappointments inseparable from the commencement of every undertaking.

We could say much on this subject. However, we will confine ourself to speaking of a congregation specially dear to M. Vianney—one of which it can be said that he presided at its birth and became its sponsor.

On 1st November, 1853, a generous-hearted Christian woman with whom divine Providence caused us to become acquainted later, being then in presence of the Blessed Sacrament, felt herself inspired to found an association of prayer for the souls in purgatory. She asked our Lord for some sign of His will in the matter; which sign was vouchsafed as she had asked. On the following day—All Souls—it occurred to her during her thanksgiving that while there existed religious orders to meet every need of the Church Militant there was none charged with the interests of the Church Suffering. It appeared to her that God was calling her to supply this deficiency. At first she was dismayed at the idea of such a mission; she therefore entreated the Lord Jesus that in remembrance of His Five Wounds He would deign to grant her yet further tokens of His will on this subject.

From the month of November, 1853, to that of July, 1855, the idea never left her. She felt herself irresistibly impelled towards the scheme, but she dared not take any action to give effect to it. Then she bethought herself of the Curé of Ars, of whom she had heard for the first time a short while previously. The belief

that this holy priest was the man chosen by divine Providence to help her in the work became more and more fixed in her mind, and she only desired that our Lord would provide some means of placing herself in communication with him. After waiting for nine days one of her friends offered to undertake any commission she might want executed at Ars. In August this friend brought her a favourable answer from the servant of God.

On 30th October she begged M. Vianney to meditate on her project on All Souls' Day. The holy Curé remained a long time with his head between his hands; then he wept and said: "This is the work for which God has been asking so long." On 11th November he caused a reply to be sent that the idea of founding an order in aid of the souls in purgatory came directly from the Heart of our Lord and that He would bless such a sublime devotion. The Abbé Toccanier, who wrote the letter, added: "You can be sure of two things; that M. le Curé approves of your vocation to the religious life and also of the new order which, according to him, will extend rapidly throughout the Church."

The foundress foreseeing obstacles on the part of her family again had recourse to the Curé of Ars, and on 25th November received this reply: "To my intense surprise M. Vianney, who usually advises young women not to act contrary to their parents' wishes, but rather await their consent and keep themselves in patience till then, has no hesitation in your case. He says that *maternal tears are sooner dried up than those shed in purgatory*. He will pray that this painful conflict between nature and grace may end in the triumph of the latter."

On the advice of M. le Curé the foundress repaired to Paris, 19th January, 1856. Crosses of every sort hailed the appearance of the little band of helpers she succeeded in gathering together. No work, no money, much suffering. At the recital of these trials the holy Curé did but smile. "She reflected well before arriving at her determination," said he, to the missionary. "She prayed, took advice, considered beforehand the sacrifices she might be called upon to make; she has every possible guarantee of success. Is anything wanting to her? Only crosses. Well! she has them. Tell her that these crosses are so many blossoms which will soon yield their fruits."

Encouraged by these words the little community redoubled their prayers. Shortly after they found a house—the one they occupy to-day. They took possession on 1st July, 1856. Since that time they have lived and worked, receiving their daily bread from their Father in heaven and devoting the time not claimed by their religious exercises to the care of the sick poor. As the number of the Sisters increased so did Providence augment His gifts; and ever fresh advances in sanctity—as we have ourselves been privileged to witness—attended this two-fold increment.

The Helpers of the Holy Souls of the Rue de Barouillière carry out in the most complete manner the words of the motto they have adopted: "To pray, to suffer and to work for the souls in purgatory."

On the death of their first and most zealous protector, Mgr. Sibour, the holy Curé sent them the following message: "A house founded on the Cross need fear neither wind, rain nor storm. Trials show clearly how pleasing a work is to God. You cannot doubt that your troubles and sacrifices have already greatly assisted the cause of the suffering souls."

In reply to a letter in which the Superioress, by the advice of the friends of the work, spoke of the poor state of her own health the Abbé Toccanier wrote: "M. le Curé says that there is nothing astonishing in the fact that you should suffer, after having offered yourself as a victim for the souls in purgatory. The good God wishes this *martyrdom*."

On the question as to whether they should continue to abandon themselves to divine Providence by devoting themselves to the care of the sick poor exclusively M. Vianney pronounced himself instantly and categorically: "Yes, yes, it is quite clear! These ideas of poverty and self-abnegation are excellent! In working for the deliverance of souls and in adopting works of mercy as the method they are realising the spirit of Jesus Christ in all its plenitude; they relieve all His suffering members at the same time—those on earth and those in purgatory."

When the Curé of Ars heard that the Helpers of the Holy Souls were following the rule of St. Ignatius he exclaimed: "Oh! the good women! they are safe! They could not have chosen better." And when on his return from a visit to Paris in 1859 M. Toccanier spoke to the good Father of his spiritual family, of the joys and sorrows which had attended its inception, he wept tears of sympathy at the relation of the ineffable ways of Providence. "Poor children!" said he, "their work is evidently the work of the good God."

Only rarely did M. Vianney quit the heights in which his soul habitually dwelt amid the pure joys of contemplation to descend to earth and concern himself with men and their affairs—and then only by force of questioning. By this process one gleaned from him at long intervals his opinions on temporal matters, or heard his expressions of alarm anent the imminence of some political crisis, or some social danger, looming in the distance.

The Curé of Ars was extremely reserved about current events. Nevertheless he foresaw the impending situation of affairs and in its most grievous aspect—a foresight of which merely human wisdom is incapable. He saw the falling away of the good and the general tendency towards evil, hypocrisy and baseness. His sorrow of heart sometimes escaped him in words that threw a prophetic light on the events of the hour.

Some time after the Congress of Paris a representative of the religious Press desired to learn the opinion of the Curé of Ars concerning a certain diplomatic event, the grave import of which could not be concealed and which had alarmed his patriotism. He addressed himself to us. The difficulty was to find an opportunity to introduce such a complex question in the brief interviews we had with the servant of God. One could hardly do more than exchange rapid and summary views on the host of matters that had to be dealt with every morning and evening. In the matter in question—at least, so it seemed to us—there would necessarily have to be a long preliminary statement before any explanation could be sought concerning a subject on which our interlocutor was so completely in the dark. Soon, however, we found an opening—on the occasion of the inspection M. Vianney was accustomed to make of the processional altars about the time of Corpus Christi. We accompanied him and on the way engaged him in the following conversation :—

“ Monsieur le Curé, something grave is happening just now which is troubling the consciences of Catholics and afflicting the friends of the Government. A conference of the Plenipotentiaries of Europe has been held in Paris, and from what was said there appears to be some danger of a change in the Imperial policy towards the Holy See. What do you think of it ? ”

“ My friend, if we are good ourselves, those who have the management of our affairs will be good also ; but sometimes God makes use of kings to chastise the peoples. ”

“ Do you think that the Emperor may recall his troops from Rome ? ”

“ No, my friend, it is there his strength lies. His soldiers will defend him better at Rome than in Paris. ”

“ It has been suggested that perhaps you might warn the powers that be. ”

M. Vianney made a gesture that seemed to say : “ Who am I to give such warnings as that ? ” And as we still insisted—making ourself the interpreter of desires that were not our own—he said : “ I suppose a line from me would suffice, eh ? ”

Who can say what the effect of such a line might have been ? How we should have deplored the fact that it had not been written if it would have availed to prevent the torrents of blood that have since been shed and, more than all, to forestall those tears, *terrible for those who caused them to flow !*

We remember the terrible anguish of the holy Curé at the time of the war in Italy. Alas ! we failed to understand it in its entirety. He was supposed to be ignorant of the very A B C of politics. But what he saw with inexpressible grief was the struggle between two Catholic nations, the armies of the Cross befouling and ensanguining the soil of a Catholic land. And he feared lest the fire raging on the far side of the Alps might not be stayed before it attacked the dwelling of the Father of the faithful.

He knew that the cause we were going to defend was that of a Government which had persecuted and despoiled the Church. He lamented that before extending to this parricidal Government the advantages of her alliance the eldest daughter of the Church had not seen fit to stipulate that a reconciliation must take place between it and her mother. In proportion as the struggle was prolonged so did his trouble and anxiety increase. During the singing of the *Te Deum* which followed the battles of Magenta and Solferino he was seen to weep bitterly. Some days before the Peace of Villafranca he said to us—he usually so reserved in his remarks on the doings of this world, in which for the most part he took no interest: “Is this going on for long? . . . It would be a disaster if it did.” We had ourselves asked him three days before how long the war would continue. “As long as we continue to offend God!” had been his reply. Next day—the octave of Corpus Christi—we said to him: “Monsieur le Curé, you will presently hold in your hands the God of Peace; ask him then to give us peace.” “Ah! my friend, we must first be at peace with ourselves.”

When this much-desired peace had been concluded between the Emperors we congratulated M. Vianney, who rejoiced at our expressions of hope, born of this treaty between two great Catholic Powers. Suddenly he interrupted us, to say with a deep sigh: “Ah! my friend, it is not finished yet.”

The knowledge of God gives its possessor both sagacity and power, because it causes the understanding to become keener at the same time as it enlarges the purview. “What seems to me the most admirable in the lives of the saints,” said an eminent Christian who was also a great politician, “is a circumstance which I think has never yet been sufficiently appreciated. The man accustomed to converse with God—all other things being equal—excels others in power of reasoning, but above all in that practical and judicial faculty called sound sense. Were the human race not irretrievably condemned to regard things in a wrong light they would seek their counsel among men from theologians, among theologians from mystics, and among mystics from those who have led a life farthest removed from the world and its affairs. Among all whom I know the only ones in whom I have found an imperturbable sound sense, a genuine sagacity, a marvellous aptitude for giving wise and practical solutions of the most difficult problems and for finding escape and issue from the most perplexing situations, are those who have led a life of retirement and contemplation.” (Donoso Cortès, *Essai sur le Catholicisme*, etc., I, viii., c. ii.)

The last words of the Marquis de Valdegamas* describe the Curé of Ars so accurately that the writer might have been supposed to have him in mind when he wrote them.

* Donoso Cortès was created Marquis de Valdegamas by Queen Maria Christina of Spain in 1843.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE VENERABLE CURÉ OF ARS AS CONFESSOR

Much labour is found here if the dispositions of hearts are to be changed, if error is to be rooted out and truth planted in its place. (St. John Chrys. Hom. III. in Ep. Cor.)

The same charity is owing to all alike, but the same medicine should not be prescribed for everyone. Charity herself seeks to bring some to the birth of the new life: she enters into the weakness of others; these she is at pains to edify, those she is fearful of offending; she condescends to the feebleness of one and shows herself unbending to another: alternately indulgent and severe, never hostile, always maternal. (St. Aug. *De Cat. rud.*, c. 15.)

No doubt the Curé of Ars had other titles to the veneration of his contemporaries, and history will possibly invest him with yet more, but his character of confessor overshadowed them all in the eyes of the pilgrims. It was to the confessor that this crowd of pilgrims from the four corners of the earth were attracted. The life of M. Vianney was passed in the confessional. Out of the eighteen or twenty hours which made up his working day he only reserved sufficient time for prayer, Mass, Office and to snatch the semblance of a meal at noon. It is difficult to understand how he could rise from these prolonged sittings retaining the full and free use of his faculties and without utter exhaustion of mind and body. On some exceptional occasion a priest can support a day's work of sixteen hours; but who is there that would not be dismayed at the prospect of having to do the same on the morrow and succeeding days; and this not for a week or a month but for thirty years—for his working lifetime.

When the servant of God had finished his day—at nine in summer and seven in winter—a crowd of women who had not been able to reach him were to be seen assembled in the little porch of the church which faced the presbytery. Each guarded her place with jealous care until the door was re-opened, which for the most part happened at midnight, sometimes at one o'clock, but at the latest at two. We know of noble ladies who, covetous of one of these places, have offered poor peasants money for them and been refused with: "Thank you, Madame, but every one is here on their own account." Others again would rise after a brief nap and keep watch on the approaches to the presbytery, in order to pounce upon the holy man on his way to the church and exchange a hasty word or two with him. He would answer them without stopping.

Sometimes M. Vianney had great difficulty in getting into the church, or a noisy and tumultuous crowd bore witness to the

eagerness that possessed each member of it to attain to the nearest place to the confessional. It was a mob which gave no little trouble to the police in their efforts "to evolve order out of chaos." The eagerness was so great that it sometimes led to small mishaps, amusing scenes and an indescribable confusion generally, which only ceased when the Curé of Ars appeared.

Then, in order that each might keep her place the women were admitted one by one by means of an iron bar—the forerunner of the modern turnstile. The same method was employed at the entrance of the chapel of St. John the Baptist, which otherwise had been carried by assault. The overplus were aligned in two ranks across the nave. It was not always easy to carry out these arrangements, for very often unruly and ignorant parties were met with who would respect no orders whatever. M. Vianney had much to bear from the petty tyranny of such. It was found necessary to place some well-disposed person on guard at the entry of the chapel and eight or ten devoted women relieved one another in this unthankful duty.

On one occasion the selfishness of a strange woman, who to get in out of her turn had roughly pushed aside her neighbours, led to such an outbreak of displeasure among those waiting outside the confessional that M. Vianney within could neither hear nor be heard by the penitent of the moment. Having vainly waited for the disturbance to subside, M. Vianney at length arose, left his confessional and walked with quiet dignity to the altar of St. Philomena, and kneeling there besought her to appease the excited little crowd. Hardly had he commenced his prayer than the indiscreet causes of the disturbance seemed to become ashamed of themselves and resumed their places in religious silence.

Sometimes it came about that less enterprising souls, who did not venture to use force to clear themselves a passage or resist encroachment on the part of others, after having spent several nights under the porch found themselves in much the same position as they were at first. The Curé of Ars would notice them, and when at length they contrived to get speech with him and explained the situation would show himself specially kind and consoling to them.

At six or seven o'clock in the morning, according to the season, M. Vianney emerged from his confessional to go to the altar. The crowd was then so closely packed that someone had to open a path for him and protect him against the intemperate attentions of people who seized him by the arm, by his surplice or his soutane. Many a time did they cause him to fall down, push him with violence or tear his clothes. But he never uttered a complaint. Having reached the sanctuary with much difficulty, he knelt for a moment motionless before the Blessed Sacrament, as if ravished by the presence of our Lord. One would have said he

saw Him. A man was always close to him to restrain the multitude. M. le Curé then vested for Mass, which everyone desired to serve, but for the most part it was a privilege granted to some eminent personage present or conceded to priests at their own request.

After Mass M. Vianney blessed such articles of piety as were brought to him ; then he returned to the presbytery and took a little milk—this formed his breakfast when he had at length been prevailed upon to have one. Then he heard the confessions of some forty or fifty men who, ranged in two lines in the choir, had been waiting their turn ever since the opening of the church.

At ten o'clock he interrupted his work, shut himself in the sacristy, and, kneeling on the floor without any support, devoutly recited his Hours. His Office finished, he passed to a little chamber under the tower to hear the confessions of the sick and other persons who were unable to prolong their stay at Ars. The way in which the crowd beset the entrance of the place in which he happened to be was a sight to see ! The utmost firmness was necessary to disengage the holy man from the crowd and then to preserve the sacristy from invasion. Often the authority of the guards was set at nought and all their efforts to keep back the crowd proved useless.

At eleven the servant of God gave his catechism. When he descended from the little tribune he was more beset on every side than before. They asked questions, caught hold of his clothes, forced letters, money, and articles of value upon him. They besought his blessing, or pressed him for medals, rosaries, pictures, souvenirs. Mothers presented their children ; sick persons threw themselves on their knees before him and barred the way. Those who had not yet been able to approach him made imploring gestures. It was difficult to pierce this human rampart and conduct M. Vianney to one of the chapels at the bottom of the church, in which he gave audience to yet more people who awaited him there. The crowd pressed upon him from behind with such impetuosity that the services of two men were nearly always necessary to regulate the movement.

The Curé of Ars then returned once more to his house to take his meal—always by breaking through the ranks of a crowd that grew more dense as he advanced. Sometimes he upset the calculations of the pilgrims, now by going to visit a sick person—but always followed by his cohort ; anon by taking a roundabout way to the presbytery. Arrived there, he often found some privileged persons waiting in his courtyard who had been furtively admitted.

While the holy Curé dined an impatient multitude outside kept a vigilant watch on every egress from the house ; and when, at a quarter to one, he appeared in the square to go to the *Providence*,

where his missionaries awaited him to confer on matters relating to the parish or the pilgrimage, this multitude rushed after him and threw themselves upon him, so that he had to be protected habitually by two men.

At the *Providence* he did no more than merely pass through the refectory without ever sitting down. The few minutes he devoted to this visit were shared between his colleagues and those pilgrims who had contrived to gain admittance by favour of the residents and who now filled every room, passage and lobby.

When he returned to the church he found the two inevitable lines of living fortifications which had re-formed during his absence. Here some force was required to instal M. Vianney in his chapel once more, amid the murmurs of some and the violence of others. First of all he recited Vespers on his knees, after which he heard confessions till five o'clock. Thence he passed to the sacristy in which he had heard the men in the morning and at intervals received some women who could not wait, behind the high altar. And whenever he moved from one part of the church to another the crowd always surged about him and hung upon his footsteps.

The greater number of those who came to Ars made a general confession, and M. Vianney lent himself readily to this tedious ministry. He knew that it would be the means of saving many souls from eternal ruin by the reparation of sacrileges. Perhaps this was the most consoling aspect of the pilgrimage. The Church has often been compared to a hospital; and Ars was in truth the great hospital for souls. Every kind of human infirmity, every sort of moral deformity found its way thither; every variety of diseased conscience came there for diagnosis and treatment. Notwithstanding the sublime sanctity of the servant of God, sinners felt drawn to him in spite of themselves and everyone derived from that hallowed contact a remedy as efficacious as it was enduring.

If one had supposed that all these labours, so continuous and so absorbing, prevented the Curé of Ars giving to each soul the special attention it needed, one would have been grievously mistaken. There was no single one of his penitents who might not have supposed himself the sole object of solicitude. The servant of God possessed the great art of knowing how to confine his attention to the immediate matter in hand. He did his work like a good workman—content to leave the past to the mercy, the future to the providence of God. Thus he avoided useless pains, precipitation and congestion of work. In the midst of a crowd always in some danger of degenerating into a mob he listened to the person who knelt at his feet as though he had nothing else to do. It is true that in order to have time for all he only devoted a little to each. He preferred to see them more frequently and hear them more briefly. "One evening," said an onlooker, "I counted fifty

laymen and there were twenty priests in the stalls. I don't know how it was managed, but every one of them was able to speak with M. le Curé."

There was grace in his lightest words. In dealing with the human heart he knew where to strike and how to strike, and his stroke rarely failed of its object. There are men gifted by our Lord with such an insight into things divine that it is apparent even in their words, which have an irresistible power in consequence. Of M. Vianney, as of Elias, it could be said that he "stood up as a fire, and his word burnt like a torch." (Ecclus., xlvi., 1), and that his words were "as a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces." (Jer. xxiii., 29). What others could not have done by lengthy exhortations he effected with a single word. That word was so charged with unction and grace that it sufficed him to touch a soul and cause it to be illuminated by the rays of the eternal light.

"By sin," said he, "we slight the good God; we crucify the good God! How sad it is that souls which have caused Jesus Christ so much suffering should be lost! . . . Tell me, my friend, what harm has our Lord done to you that you should treat Him so? . . . And if the poor lost ones could only return to earth! . . . if they could be in your place! . . ."

"Oh! what ingrates we are! The good God calls us to Him and we flee from Him. He wants to make us happy and we will have none of it; He commands us to love Him and we give our heart to the devil instead. We employ the time He gave us in which to save ourselves for our own ruin. We make war on Him with the very means he gave us for His service . . ."

"When we offend the good God, if we were to look at our crucifix we should hear our Lord say to us: 'And you will side with my enemies, too, then? You wish to crucify me afresh?' Look at our Lord nailed to the Cross and say to yourself: 'Behold what it cost my Saviour to repair the injuries my sins have done to God!' A God who came on earth to be the victim of our sins, a God who suffered, a God who died, a God who endured such torments because He would take the burden of our sins upon Himself . . . let the sight of that Cross convince you of the malice of sin and of the hatred you ought to have for it. Enter into yourself; see what is amiss with your poor life . . ."

"Oh! what a pity it is! The good God will say to you after your death: 'Why didst thou offend me, who have loved thee so?' . . . O my child! to offend the good God who never did us ought but good! to gratify the devil who can never do us anything but evil! . . . what folly!"

These words, coming from the heart and uttered in a voice broken by tears, would overcome the most obdurate and rebellious natures.

When, after the accusation of his sins, the penitent said that there was nothing else : " What ! " exclaimed the Curé of Ars, " you have nothing else ! What more would you have done then ? "

Sometimes God came to the aid of the eloquence of His minister and hastened the triumph of grace by striking signs which confounded the guilty party and compelled him to throw himself into the arms of the divine mercy. One day when neither entreaties, adjurations nor tears had availed to overcome the obstinacy of an unhappy sinner M. Vianney saw him suddenly fall on his knees and with tears promise amendment. The obdurate penitent had that instant beheld the head of the servant of God surrounded by a luminous halo and had been unable to resist such an unwonted sight. This fact was attested by the Curé of Ars himself, and we have an authentic proof of it in a letter written in 1846 :—

" Our holy Curé has spoken to me of all the good that has been accomplished at Ars and of the consolation he has derived from it. Never before has he opened his heart to me with so much freedom, I might even say with such suavity. He assured me that every year the pilgrimage has snatched an infinite number of sinners from the grasp of Satan ; that he has continually received persons in the confessional who had not made a confession for thirty or forty years . . . He related most ingenuously how one evening one of these old sinners was in the sacristy and could not make up his mind to confess his sins. Suddenly this man burst into tears and commenced his confession with uncontrollable agitation. The Curé asked him why he wept and why he was so troubled. The old sinner replied that on looking at him he had seen his head surrounded by a halo of light. The good *Saint* expressed it in the most simple fashion. '*He told me that he had seen little candles round my head.*' He also spoke of another sinner who in the middle of the night heard a voice which cried to him : ' Go and seek the Curé of Ars.' He came and was converted."

— The servant of God was kind to all, and we have noted elsewhere his special kindness to sinners ; but this universal benevolence assumed a still more touching character in regard to persons consecrated to God by the vow of chastity and the practice of the evangelical virtues. In them he recognised inhabitants of the regions in which his own soul dwelt. He received such persons with unmistakable delight, as one friend receives another. In that reception there was more than benevolence ; there was cordiality, the joy that rises in the heart at the sight of one who is tenderly loved.

Those who needed a guide to ascend the mountain of God were never weary of coming to Ars, and they returned there unceasingly.

Who could conduct them better to those heights than the holy Curé? In him they recognised a native of the country to which they aspired. And as Alpine mountaineers who guide the tourist in his ascent to their rugged summits, and thence discover to him a vast panorama never take any credit to themselves for it, so the Curé of Ars led to God every soul who demanded his services and, forgetting himself, thought only of congratulating that soul on its happiness and rejoicing with it.

Troubled minds who came to unburden themselves, feeble souls in need of courage, unquiet spirits seeking peace, those in doubt who asked for faith, men of good will striving for self-conquest—all found in his confessional precisely the counsel suitable to their state, and this admirable confessor varied his treatment according to the requirements of each. The marvel was that his direction met the necessities of even the innermost weaknesses of those whom he now saw for the first time.

In direction the most important—as it is the most delicate—point is to follow the call of God and induce others to do so too; not to forestall the Holy Spirit; to advise with due regard to the state of souls in order to render them conformable to Jesus Christ. And as everyone sows and reaps in his own furrow, so there are degrees in merit and shades in virtue—stars more or less brilliant in a firmament of the same glory. M. Vianney was wonderfully endowed with spiritual discernment and tact. Once he had recognised the capacity and possibilities of the case, alternately exacting or facile, he either confined himself to the Commandments or opened to his penitent the illimitable fields of the Counsels. Thus while he shaped his course according to grace he modified it according to nature at the same time. When the gardener selects a strong and robust plant on which to graft a slip of another more frail and tender, the new fruits and flowers produced by the first have not for all that the power to change its distinctive character and deprive it of its natural strength. An olive-tree is ever an olive-tree, and an almond-tree an almond; only, instead of bearing alien fruits, they bear better-flavoured ones; all the difference lies there. In the same manner the new life grafted on by grace elevates, purifies and sanctifies all that was originally in us, without suppressing the good, honest and legitimate qualities planted there by nature. The confessor should imitate the gardener.

What rendered this task more easy to the servant of God was that he had received the gift of discernment of spirits in a very eminent degree. The veil with which our flesh covers the soul was so transparent in him that he saw face to face all that the body, transfigured after the holy purification of the tomb, will permit us to perceive when the senses shall correspond to the intuitive needs of the spirit. He had in some sort anticipated

this state of risen nature. He read the hearts of his penitents like an open book and discovered faults hidden in the innermost recesses of their conscience—in those depths of the soul which are never explored. It is impossible not to believe he had a revelation of the interior state of those who presented themselves to him and penetrated their most secret thoughts. We know for certain that he told a great number they were making incomplete confessions. It was of daily occurrence for him to tell at first sight what were the leanings or vocation of those who came to consult him and by what ways God wished to conduct them.

Examples of this lucidity abound in the lives of the saints. St. Dominic, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas of Aquin, St. Francis of Paula, St. Ignatius, St. Joseph of Cupertino, St. Philip Neri, who sanctified themselves by the ministry of souls, all enjoyed this gift; as well as St. Clare, St. Colette, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Teresa, St. Juliana, St. Rose and others.

“When I presented myself to M. Vianney for the first time,” relates one of his penitents, “my director had forbidden me to make a general confession to him. This prohibition, together with the brief space he had at disposal for each by reason of the crowd, prevented me from seeking to make myself known to him, as I am most careful to do when I desire to confide the care of my soul to anyone. I mentioned to him neither the sins of my past life nor the graces that God had vouchsafed me. I was much surprised when a woman repeated two words he had said to her bearing on these interior graces, of which he could have no knowledge save by supernatural illumination. How many times has not that experience been renewed! The whole behaviour of the good Father towards me proves that he discerned in my soul things I could hardly discern myself.

“Oppressed by an uneasiness of spirit connected with my vocation, I hesitated to disclose it to him, finding it difficult to explain myself accurately and fearing that in default of a perfect understanding he would pronounce a decision that might trouble me for the remainder of my life. I had more confidence in him than in anybody else and felt that nothing that another might say could efface the impression of his words. As he concerned himself with nothing but the integrity of my confession, I resolved, albeit unwillingly, to keep silence. I cannot describe my feelings when he replied to the question that was secretly agitating me and with a precision I should not have dared to hope for, even had I explained the matter with the utmost care and minuteness. Often has he brought to my notice faults I had not recognised in myself or which I had forgotten. One day when he had graciously expressed the pleasure my arrival had given him, self-love caused me to feel flattered quite unconsciously. I was

admonished of this when—as if in answer to my thoughts—he added that it was because of the presence of my guardian angel. I was the only one who understood the implication.

“I had long known a young woman of very remarkable virtue. She had such an evident vocation that the opposition of her parents, reinforced by that of her bishop, was a veritable torment to her and affected her health. I was entirely in her confidence, and one day she said: ‘My parents do not understand what a vocation is.’ She was right. Her father and mother were very pious and left her absolutely free in the exercise of her devotion and charity, but failed to realise how much she suffered. She had never been to Ars until one day an opportunity arose of accompanying one of her friends there. She made a very short stay, but nevertheless made her confession to M. le Curé. On her return she told me she had opened her heart to him and that he had replied in the sweetest and most consoling terms, assuring her that in a year her trials would come to an end, without, however, explaining further. A few months later I heard of the marriage of her sister; and I eagerly enquired whether her parents would now allow Mademoiselle M. to enter a convent. The answer was No. On the contrary, they were more determined than ever to keep her with them. Unwilling to violate her confidence, I only said to myself: ‘You will see, that will be her death.’ And indeed in the following spring she was carried off by an acute malady, in spite of the promises of her parents that if she recovered they would no longer oppose her vocation.

“Some years after I began to go to Ars I noticed a woman of mature age who had a room in the house in which I lodged. She had her own furniture and came and went at pleasure, usually remaining for months. My own timidity hindered any advance on my part and she, thinking me proud, made no move. We met several times without speaking, when one day we both found ourselves waiting in the square for the opening of the *Providence* for catechism and I addressed her. The ice was broken. She was a person who did a great deal of good and had even founded or helped to found a house of charity. She was much esteemed by the priests of her own parts; she led a very regular but entirely human and natural life. She was content with herself, found herself quite good enough as she was, nor had she the least idea of doing anything better. She came to Ars, and M. le Curé endeavoured to enlighten even at the risk of troubling her. She remained a long time without accepting his lights, without seeing and without comprehending, agitated and weary; and in this state she returned home. The two priests in her parish did all they could to calm and persuade her not to go to Ars again, but she took no notice of them. Grace got the upper hand. She came back to Ars; she accepted the light given to her and found a

great peace, joy and happiness. M. le Curé urged her along the path of detachment. She had a little dog of which she was very fond, and the prudent director compelled her to give up her excessive attachment to it. He allowed her to keep it, as she lived in the country and needed a watch-dog, but forbade all demonstrations of over-affection towards it. At first she had a great fear of M. le Curé, but gradually became more at her ease with him. She was an educated woman. It seems to me that when *le bon Père* first saw her his inward reflection was: What a pity it is that this soul does not love God more perfectly! He put his hand to the work and succeeded without being daunted by the anxieties, struggles and trouble of heart through which this soul had to pass before finding the better path in life and courage to follow it.

"I sent an old sinner to Ars whom nobody in his parish could remember ever having seen at confession. M. le Curé entreated him with tears to do his duty, but without avail. The servant of God laid his hand on the man's heart.

" 'There is something wrong here,' said he. 'How long is it since your last confession?' 'Forty years.' 'My friend, it is more than that: it is forty-four!'"

A workman employed on the Mâcon-Bourg railway had heard of the Curé of Ars. He had neglected the practices of religion for many years, but now he felt a sudden inspiration to go and see for himself whether all that was said about the *Saint* was true. He came and was delighted with all he saw. He presented himself in the sacristy where M. Vianney received the men:

"My friend, how many years is it since you were last at confession?"

"Upon my word, Monsieur le Curé, it is such a long time that I don't remember." "Think a little, my friend; try and recollect . . . It is twenty-eight years." "Twenty-eight years, eh? . . . twenty-eight years? . . . it's quite true!" "And then you did not go to Holy Communion; you only received absolution." "That is true too!" This two-fold revelation overcame the obstacles to the man's return to a better way of life; he became and remained an exemplary Christian.

A ne'er-do-weel who was the terror of his neighbourhood having committed various highway-robberies and many other crimes besides, had contracted very serious infirmities. Hearing that the sick were cured at Ars, he decided to try if anything could be done for him there. He presented himself to the Curé, who at first refused to see him. Much disgusted at this, he was disposed to take his departure, when the idea seized him of returning to the church once more. M. Vianney noticed him and had him called to him. As the man entered the sacristy he said to himself: "M. le Curé wants me to make my confession, but I

will only say just as much as I feel inclined to." When he had finished his pretended confession M. Vianney, who had listened in silence, said: "Is that all?" "Yes," replied the penitent. "But," rejoined the servant of God, "you did not mention that on such a day in such a place you committed such a crime." Whereupon he told the fellow the history of his life better than he could have told it himself. Needless to say the man changed, made a sincere avowal of his sins, and not only obtained absolution but his cure as well. He went back home and became a model of penitence and devotion.

A most respectable person who passed twenty years under the direction of M. Vianney confided to us that never during a troubled life had she been confronted with any trial without being prepared in advance by words that fortified her soul, but the prophetic significance of which she failed to comprehend till after the blow had fallen. One day, however, her director was more explicit. "My daughter, there is a great sorrow in store for you; summon up all your fortitude to bear it." This mother lost two sons in six months!

—Another witness writes to us: "For a long time I was fearful that I might be under some illusion concerning my confessions; and this caused me much uneasiness, although I had been advised many times not to recur to the past. When I made my confession to M. Vianney it did not occur to me to say why I had made the pilgrimage to Ars, but I spoke of it to him afterwards. His brief and favourable reply was so definite that it completely reassured me, while at the same time it moved me exceedingly. It proved to me that, as I had heard before, this holy priest had the gift of scrutiny of hearts, otherwise he would not have affirmed so peremptorily a fact of which he could have no natural certainty."

Here is a letter which chance has put into our hands and which reveals the same clairvoyance and unerring intuition of the Curé of Ars:—

"Ars, 11th June, 1856.

"Très révérend Monsieur le Curé,

"I own that I came here without being positively persuaded of your power and the inspiration vouchsafed to you by Almighty God; but after the few words you said to me my prejudices have vanished. I am resolved to change my life, to do what I can to reform the baneful habits I have contracted and of which I am so much ashamed that I should never have had the courage to confess, had I not met you, *mon bon Père*, and if you had not at once pointed out the evil. I wish to make my confession to you before leaving and I have to leave this evening. Have the kindness to tell the person who brings you this letter whether it is possible for you to hear me."

An orphan at the *Providence* had been dismissed from the

confessional without absolution several times. Not seeing her go to Communion, the mistresses became uneasy and said to her : " You go to confession as often as your companions, why do you not go to Communion with them ? Perhaps you are not sufficiently open in the accusation of your faults ; you do not tell everything." The child blushed, then she owned that she had concealed a grave sin and that since she had committed it M. le Curé had not given her absolution. She made a great effort and confessed her sin as it should be confessed. The holy Curé at once changed his manner towards her and sent her to the Holy Table.

In 1847 three women—mother, daughter and grand-daughter—were at Ars for some days ! Wearied with a long and fruitless wait, at the end of a stay of several hours in the church they mentally resolved to leave, but without communicating their resolve to one another. At the same moment the Curé of Ars came out of his confessional, and fixing his piercing gaze on them, signed to the young girl to follow him into the sacristy. This child was in a very delicate state of conscience. Unknown to her parents she had allowed herself to become entangled in one of those inextricable difficulties which jeopardise both reputation and salvation. Her state had been divined and she had hardly any need to reveal it. The very complicated affairs of her conscience were put in order and she went away consoled, strengthened and enlightened.

A young man from Rive-de-Gier conceived the idea of deceiving M. Vianney by a simulated repentance and flattering himself thereafter that for once the holy man's perspicacity had failed him. Wherefore he approached the servant of God with a contrite air : " I am a great sinner and come to you with a heart weighed down by sorrow !" The Curé of Ars, instead of opening his arms at all, replied, very drily : " My friend, I have no time. You will find plenty of priests to hear you elsewhere." Saying which he turned away from him. Wholly astonished, the young man related what had happened, and was told that M. Vianney had doubtless read his heart and seen that there was no purpose of amendment there. They exhorted him to repent and he returned to the church. There one of those decisive blows awaited him which force a man to recollect himself in God. Hardly had he fallen on his knees than he felt himself penetrated by a sincere desire of conversion. He presented himself anew to the holy priest, who received him with an overflowing tenderness and now showed himself such as he always showed himself to a truly repentant sinner.

Almighty God gives His grace to the humble, but He resists the proud. The Curé of Ars resisted them too ; to them his heart was closed, his reception cold, his speech curt and his eyes had

no tears for them. Many have experienced this manner, so different from what it was habitually. The true obstacle to light and the empire of God in the heart is not, as might be supposed, certain weaknesses or troubles which are so shameful that their unfortunate victim is the first to blush for them. The grand obstacle is pride—pride under every form and in every degree: pride of spirit and pride of heart; the pride of the great and the pride of those of low degree; the pride of the rich and the pride of the poor; the pride that flaunts itself and the pride that is concealed. It was so in the days of our Saviour. Who was it that followed his footsteps? Who besieged the doors and uncovered the roof of the house in which He had deigned to rest? Who hung upon His lips and drank in His words, heedless of the most urgent demands of the body, if only they might hear? It was the poor sinners, the lost sheep of the house of Israel: a Nathanael, a Zacheus, a Magdalen. On the other hand, who kept aloof from Him with sombre jealousy, laid snares for Him, pursued Him with sarcasms and hypocritical invective? To whom did He address His reproaches, His complaints, His burning anathemas and sometimes His divine indignation? It was to the Pharisees, the doctors, the pseudo-sages of those times; to those ostentatiously good people whom He did not hesitate to call whited sepulchres; to those whom He reproached with saying but doing not—with making clean only the outside of the cup and platter.

We remember a person who had been led to Ars by exceptional reverses of fortune following on grave disorders and who was more affected by the humiliations of her position than by remorse of conscience. This woman was surprised not to find in the holy Curé all that tenderness of heart and indulgent kindness which she had heard extolled by others. One day she gave vent to her feelings. "I feel that I am repulsive to the holy man." "No," was the reply, "but there must be something about you that instinctively displeases him . . . Humble yourself; regard your misfortunes with a calmer eye and less rebellious spirit; see in them a chastisement for your sins; multiply acts of willing submission and self-abasement, and you will find that M. le Curé will change his manner towards you." The advice was followed, and *le bon Père* took this unhappy person to his heart and gave her of his treasures of sympathy, unction and pity.

There are numerous instances of sinners to whom M. Vianney said after they had made their confession: "You have not told all; you have not mentioned this fault . . . you have not accused yourself of having deceived your confessors hitherto, of having been in such a place in company with so and so, of having committed this act of injustice, of your inclination to that passion." At other times he would simply say: "That is not the

whole; there is something more to be said," or perhaps: "You are forgetting one fault." No day passed that he did not descry among the crowd some sinner more guilty, more blind or more hardened than the rest; and make a sign for him or her to approach, or go out and take the individual by the hand and lead him to the confessional. The principal conversions effected at Ars were the results of such direct appeals.

These facts should astonish no one. Union with God gives a man the faculty of piercing the veil of the flesh and arriving at the mysterious depths of the conscience behind it. In the ordinary state of things the soul sallies out of her sanctuary to pour herself out upon the world of sense; in the mystic state the contrary is the case. When by long practice of contemplation the soul has attained to a truly interior spirit she finds herself prepared to ascend to God and lose herself in Him. The man being no longer distracted by the sights or sounds of the world and conscious neither of what creatures say or what he says himself is solely occupied in converse with God. No inspiration is lost upon him. The mind not being directed to sensible things but towards those regions whence comes truth is endowed with clearer and more wholesome perceptions. Just as the body, purified by fasting, becomes in some sort less material, so the soul, sanctified by disregard of external things, receives celestial impressions from on high and acquires clearer and more exalted ideas. In this state man is no more than one spirit with God. Thus united to Him who is the essential Unity, he acquires within himself a unity and simplicity ever greater. The more simple he becomes the higher he ascends; and in this continual ascent the greater his annihilation of self the greater his development in God, and at the same time the purer he becomes until, clear as crystal or pure as gold tried in the fire, he has no longer anything of his own, but belongs to God in his entirety.

CHAPTER XL

THE CURÉ OF ARS IN HIS CATECHISMS

The mouth of the just shall bring forth wisdom. (Prov. x., 31)

Methought I heard the murmuring of a river, that doth fall from rock to rock transpicuous, making known the richness of his spring-head. (Dante, Paradise, c. xx.)

"THERE is no doubt," says Père Gratry, "that in purity of heart, innocence, either preserved or recovered by virtue, faith and religion, there exist in the human heart, mind and body, capacities and possibilities for the most part unsuspected. It is to this order of possibilities that belongs what theology terms infused knowledge, the inspired intellectual virtues wherewith the divine Word endows the understanding, when He dwells in us by faith and love." And the learned Oratorian—excusing himself for his inability to translate them better—quotes with enthusiasm the magnificent utterances of a saint who lived in one of the monasteries on the banks of the Rhine in the eleventh century. "What purifies the eye of the heart and renders it capable of receiving the true light is contempt of the things of this life, mortification of the body, contrition of heart, abundance of tears . . . meditation on the admirable essence of God and of His chaste truth, prayer fervent and pure, joy in God, the ardent desire of heaven. Encompass all this and continue in it. Advance towards the light that is offered to you, as to sons, and which will of itself descend into your hearts. Relinquish your own affections and centre them upon Him who speaks to you and He will replenish your hearts with brilliancy divine, and you will become children and angels of God." (*Logique*, 1, V. *Les vertus intellectuelles inspirées*).

Thus it was that M. Vianney trained himself in the school of the Holy Spirit. "What master had you in theology?" was the question put to him on one occasion, with slightly ironic intention. "The same Master as St. Peter," replied the servant of God, with true simplicity.

Would not one be inclined to say that the scheme of life expounded above had been elaborated in view of the life of the Curé of Ars? There is no detail that does not recall him, not a single action that fails to harmonise marvellously with his own. What man has ever pushed to greater extremes *the contempt of the things of this life, mortification of the body, abundance of tears?* Tears! why he was always bathed in them . . . And *meditation on the admirable essence of God and of His chaste truth and prayer fervent and pure, joy in God, the ardent desire of heaven*; how

characteristic they all are of him ! how exactly they describe the man as we have seen him ! He *advanced towards the light* and *the light descended of itself into his heart* . . . He had *relinquished his own affections, he had centred them upon Him who spoke to him*. He who spoke to him—the divine Word, the Word of God uncreate—*replenished his heart with brilliancy divine*. How could any doubt exist in the mind of those who had the happiness of assisting at any one of his catechisms of the truth of this last ? They heard this strange speech, which scarcely resembled human speech ; they saw the irresistible effect produced on his hearers of every class by that voice, that tenderness, that elevation, that intuition, that ardour and the singular beauty of that unpolished French, almost trivial, but penetrated with and transfigured by a sacred fire, down to its form, arrangement and harmony—how could they doubt ? Nevertheless, the Curé of Ars did not speak mere words. True eloquence consists in the things spoken of, and these he treated of in a wondrous style. His word inflamed the hearts of the crowd beneath him and caused them to believe, love and hope as he did himself. And this is the object as it is the triumph of evangelistic eloquence.

How came it that this man who had despaired of admission to the Greater Seminary because of his apparent incapacity, who since his ordination to the priesthood had been occupied with nothing but prayer and the confessional, how came it that such an one should have acquired a mastery of dogma not unworthy of a Father of the Church ? From what source could these wonderful lights on God and His works, on the nature and history of the soul emanate ? And how did it happen that he should express the same thoughts—and sometimes even in the same words—as such shining lights of Christianity as St. Augustine, St. Bernard, St. Thomas, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Teresa ?

For example, we have often heard him say that the heart of the saints was *liquid*. We had been struck with this delightful and forcible expression, but we were far from surmising that it was strictly accurate theologically. It was with affectionate surprise, at the memory of our good *Saint*, that on perusing the *Summa* we found a question in which the angelic doctor assigns four immediate effects to love, of which the first is the *liquefaction of the heart*. (St. Thomas : *Summa* I. II., q.28, a.5). The Curé of Ars had certainly never read St. Thomas, and it is the more remarkable therefore that he should have expressed himself in identical terms with the great theologian. It is a prodigy only for those who are not cognisant with the workings of grace and who have not understood the Master's words : " I confess to thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and has revealed them to little ones." (Matt. xi., 25).

It frequently happened to persons who had heard M. Vianney discourse on heavenly things that they left the church thoroughly convinced that *le bon Père* actually saw what he had just described with an unction so penetrating. There was in his voice, look and gesture, in his transfigured features, a power so marvellous that it was impossible to listen unmoved. The views and thoughts communicated by the light divine have an import far different from those acquired by study. In presence of an exposition so simple and at the same time so luminous, before a conviction so absolute, doubt vanished from the hearts of the most obdurate, and the admirable light of faith took its place.

The spoken word of the Curé of Ars derived still more efficacy from the fact that he preached to sight as well as to hearing. His mere presence was in itself a sermon. Of him it could be said that he was an *orator of the eyes* and one who would have moved and convinced even by his silence. When they saw him appear in the pulpit with a countenance pale, emaciated and transparent ; when they heard that voice shrill, piercing, almost a cry, enunciating the most sublime reflections in naïve and popular language they could almost imagine themselves confronted with one of the great biblical figures of old, speaking to men in the language of the prophets. They were already imbued with respect, filled with confidence and disposed to listen, not so much to enjoy as to profit by what they heard.

— Before beginning, the venerable catechist would scan his auditory, as if to survey the field in which he was about to work. Sometimes his look would become fixed ; it seemed to search the depths of some soul upon which the *Saint* had suddenly lit and in which he was seeking to find a text for his discourse. How many have gone away convinced that he had spoken to themselves alone ! How many more have recognised their own in the picture he drew of particular weaknesses ! And how many have listened to the story of their private allurements, failures, anxieties, struggles and remorse !

For those to whom it was given to assist at these catechisms there were two points equally remarkable : the preacher and the auditor. As regards the first, he preached not so much by word of mouth as by word of soul—a saintly soul steeped in faith and love displayed before you, of which you felt the immediate contact and which shed its radiance upon your own. As to the auditor, he was no longer on earth ; he was transported to those pure regions beyond, whence descend dogmas and mysteries. And while the holy catechist continued, new and clearer horizons opened to the mind's eye : heaven and earth, present and future, things of time and things of eternity appeared in a light in which it had never before regarded them.

When a man fresh from the world and saturated with its ideas,

opinions and maxims, sat himself down to listen to this doctrine he was first astonished and then confounded—so startling a defiance was it of the world and all the world esteems and holds dear! Little by little he relented and ended in tears like the rest. What eloquence ever induced more tears! And whose word ever penetrated hearts more deeply! It effected more than mere charm of intellect, it dominated the soul and led it to God, not so much by the often long and difficult road of discussion and argument as by the appeal it made to the higher feelings of duty, gratitude and love to God, together with sorrow for having offended Him.

An eminent doctor of Lyons told us that some twenty years back he made the pilgrimage to Ars in company of a caravan of relations and friends. He was no unbeliever, he had imbibed excellent principles; but he had no notion of what a saint is and not the least idea of the spectacle that awaited him. The catechism commenced and at first he found himself struggling against an uncontrollable desire to laugh immoderately. Unwilling to scandalise the crowd of good folks by whom he was surrounded, he hid his face in his hands. At the end of five minutes he laughed no more and tears which he made no attempt to conceal coursed down his cheeks. What he now heard was so different from what he had imagined that it seemed like a dream. What impressed him more than all was the air of profound conviction with which every word was uttered and which carried it straight home to the hearts of the hearers and infected them with the very spirit of the *Saint* himself.

One listened to M. Vianney as to a new apostle whom Jesus Christ had sent to His Church to renew in her the fervour and sanctity of His divine Spirit at a time of which the corruption had caused both to degenerate so profoundly in the soul of the greater number. And it is truly marvellous that while presenting for acceptance the same doctrine as the Apostles—incomprehensible to human reason and most unpalatable to the depraved taste of the world, for it treats of nothing but the Cross, humiliations, poverty and penance—this doctrine should have been so well received. Those who had it not in the heart before were glad to lay the seeds of it now. If they lacked courage to make it their rule of life they could not but find it admirable and desire to follow it.

It is not less remarkable that, speaking nothing but his native idiom—that is the incorrect French of those brought up in country districts—one could nevertheless say that M. Vianney, like the Apostles, has been heard by every nation under heaven and that his voice has resounded in every corner of the earth. He was the oracle whom everyone consulted to learn how to know Jesus Christ as He would be known. Nor was it only the simple and the perfect only, but also the learned and the indifferent—all

went to seek in him that divine unction which, while penetrating them, caused them to desire yet more. The more one heard the more one wanted to hear, and one ever returned to the foot of that pulpit as to a place where one had first found the true and the beautiful, for if one thing was plainer than another it was that the Curé of Ars was filled with the Spirit of God.

The holy catechist spoke without any other preparation than his continual recollection in God. He passed without delay or transition straight from the confessional to the pulpit; and he always carried himself with an imperturbable assurance, born not at all of self-confidence and altogether of self-forgetfulness. Besides which one was never tempted to criticise him. As a rule men only criticise those to whom criticism is a matter of some consequence. And when listening to the apostle of Ars one always found a much more profitable subject for criticism—oneself.

It was a matter of complete indifference to M. Vianney what anyone thought or said about him. Whatever might be the composition of his audience, though there were bishops and other illustrious personages—and such often happened—mingled with the crowd that surrounded his pulpit, no word of his ever betrayed the slightest emotion, nor did the least embarrassment point to human respect. As he—usually so timid and so modest—passed through the serried ranks of the often imposing congregation which filled the church at catechism-time he was no longer the same man, he had the air of one who goes to a triumph. He carried his head erect, his countenance was lighted up, his eyes flashed fire.

“Does your audience ever make you feel nervous?” he was asked one day. “No,” replied he “on the contrary, the more people there are the better I am pleased.” Then, to turn the laugh against himself, he added: “Conceited persons always think they do well.” He would have had Pope, Cardinals and Kings in front of him without saying more or less, thinking only of their souls himself and thinking only of making them think of God. This veritable domination of his audience served him in place of talent and rhetoric, and gave to the simplest words that issued from those venerable lips a dignity of their own and clothed them with irresistible authority.

Another thing that contributed in no small degree to the effect of these discourses of M. Vianney was the high opinion the pilgrims entertained of his sanctity. “The prime necessity of the man called to the perilous office of instructing the people,” says St. Isidore, “is to be himself holy and irreproachable. He whose mission it is to wean others from sin must be a stranger to it; the man who has the task of guiding others to perfection should appear to be a model of perfection in everything.” (Hom. I., II. *De offic.*). In the saintly catechist of Ars it was virtue

that preached truth. When he spoke of the love of God, humility, gentleness, patience, mortification, sacrifice, purity and love of suffering, his own example lent immense weight to his words. A man is well equipped for persuasion and conquest when he is seen to practise his own teaching.

The method employed by the Curé of Ars was to clothe his idea in the simplest possible language consistent with accuracy of description, the form selected suggesting appropriate expression. He understood how to bring truths of the very highest order within the range of every degree of intelligence ; he explained them in familiar language ; he moved by his simplicity, he charmed by his doctrine.

It is somewhat remarkable that this man, so simple and humble and so ready to avow his own ignorance, should yet have a very keen appreciation of intellectual gifts in others. The highest encomium he could pass on anybody was to say that he was a man of parts. When the good qualities of any person, clerical or lay, were discussed in his presence he rarely failed to complete the panegyric by saying : " What I like best of all about him is that he is learned."

But though M. Vianney held eloquence in others in high esteem, and blessed God who, for His own glory, had endowed man with such a gift, he disdained it for himself ; nor had he the smallest scruple about mangling both grammar and syntax outrageously in his discourses. One can well believe that out of humility he did so of set purpose, for he committed solecisms that could easily have been avoided. But the crudity of his language was no hindrance to its finding its way straight to the hearts of his hearers, enlightening and converting them. " The polished discourse," says St. Jerome, " only tickles the ear ; the unpolished address appeals to the heart."

The word of the Curé of Ars was both swift and to the point—like an arrow it sped and his whole soul seemed to go with it. Besides which there was much that was both striking and beautiful. The pathetic, the profound and the sublime were often found side by side with the simple and commonplace. There was all the unconstraint and lack of method, but also all the spontaneity and power of an improvisation. We have sometimes tried to write down what we had just heard, but found it impossible to do justice to the points that had moved us most. The words came but the spirit had fled. The wind never commits its whisperings among the forest trees to writing, neither does the ocean record its heavings or its crash upon the strand. So it is with the spiritual side of man's nature. A divine influence may be felt but cannot be described.

Nevertheless, here are some fragments that we have gathered up and in which we recognise not merely an echo or souvenir,

but the Curé of Ars himself—his heart and soul in all their naïve expression.

“The love of God : Oh ! how beautiful that is !! We need to be in heaven to understand it. Prayer helps us a little, because it is the elevation of the soul to heaven . . .

“The more one knows of men the less one loves them. With God it is just the contrary : the better one knows Him the better one loves Him.

“A time will come when man will be so weary of man that it will be impossible to speak to him of God without causing him to weep.

“The knowledge of God enkindles such great love in the soul that she cannot love or desire anything outside Him . . . Man was created by love : that is why he is so carried away by it. On the other hand, he is so great that nothing on earth is sufficient for him. It is only when he turns to God that he is satisfied. Take a fish from its water and it will die. Well then ! such is man without God.

“There are people who do not love the good God, who never pray to Him, and yet prosper. It is a bad sign ! They do a little good together with a great deal of evil. The good God rewards them in this life.

“Earth is a bridge on which to cross the water ; it serves no other purpose than a place whereon to stand . . . We are in the world, but we are not of the world, seeing that we say every day ; *Our Father who art in heaven* . . . We must then wait for our reward till we go home to our Father's house . . . That is why good Christians find crosses, contradictions, adversity, contempt, calumny : so much the better for them ! . . . But they are surprised at it. It would seem, then, that because one loves the good God a little all ought to go well and there should be no suffering at all . . . We say : ‘Such an one is not good and, nevertheless, everything succeeds with him ; it is in vain that I do my best, all goes wrong with me.’ This is because we do not understand the value and happiness of the Cross. Sometimes it is said God chastises those whom He loves. That is not true, *trials are not chastisements for those whom God loves ; they are graces* . . . We must not consider the labour, but the recompense. A merchant does not look at the trouble his business costs him, but at the gain he hopes to make by it . . . What are twenty or thirty years compared to eternity ? . . . What have we to bear then ? A few humiliations, a few affronts, a harsh word or two : *such things do not kill one*.

“It is beautiful to think that such poor things as we are can yet please God !

“Our tongue should not be used except in prayer, our heart should be employed in nothing but loving and our eyes in nought but weeping.

“We are everything and yet nothing . . . There is nothing greater than man and nothing smaller. Nothing greater when we regard the soul ; nothing smaller when we think of the body . . . We take care of the body as if it were the only thing we have to consider ; on the contrary, that is the only thing we have to condemn.

“We are the handiwork of a God . . . One always loves one's own work . . . It is easy to understand that we are the work of a God ; but that the crucifixion of a God should be our own handiwork, why that is incomprehensible indeed.

“There are some who think the Eternal Father has a hard heart. Oh ! what an error is there ! The Eternal Father, in order to disarm his own justice, has given His Son an excessively kind heart. Our Lord said to His Father : ‘ Father, do not punish them ! . . . ’

“Our Lord suffered more than was necessary to redeem us. But what would have satisfied His Father's justice would not have satisfied His own love.

“Without our Lord's death the entire human race would have been powerless to expiate one small falsehood.

“In the world both heaven and hell are carefully kept out of sight. Heaven, because if one recognised its beauty one would want to go there at any price ; one would leave the world to go its own way in peace ! Hell, because if one only knew the pains that are endured in it one would do anything rather than go there.

“The sign of the Cross is formidable to the devil, since it is by that same Cross that we escape him . . . We should make the sign of the Cross with great reverence. We begin it on the forehead ; it is the principal part, reminding us of our creation, the Father ; then on the heart, signifying love, Redemption, the Son ; afterwards on the shoulders, telling of strength, the Holy Spirit . . . Our whole being recalls the Cross. We ourselves are made in the form of a cross.

“In heaven we shall be sustained by the breath of God . . . The good God will place us, just as a mason places the stones in a building, each one in its appropriate place.

“Heaven was founded in the soul of the saints. Their soul was an overflowing of heaven in which they bathed and were drowned. As the disciples on Thabor saw nothing but Jesus, so interior souls see nobody in their heart save our Lord. They are two friends who never weary of one another ! . . .

“There are some who lose their faith and only see hell when they enter it.

“The lost will be enveloped by the wrath of God, like a fish in the water.

“It is not God who condemns us ; it is we ourselves by our

sins. The lost do not reproach God ; they reproach themselves ; they say : ‘ I have lost God, my own soul and heaven by my own fault . . . ’ No one has ever been lost because he did too much wrong ; but many are in hell on account of a single mortal sin of which they would not repent.

“ Could a lost soul only say but once : ‘ My God, I love thee ! ’ there would be no more hell for him . . . But, alas ! that poor soul ! *it has lost the power of loving that it once possessed and of which it has not known how to make use.*

“ *The heart of the lost is dried up, like a grape that has been passed through the press.* There can be no happiness, no peace in that soul, because there is no love.

“ ‘ *Unhappy ones !* ’ said St. Teresa, ‘ *they do not love !* ’

“ Hell derives its torment from the goodness of God. The lost will say : ‘ Oh ! if only God had not loved us so, we should suffer less ! Hell would be supportable ! . . . *But to have been loved so much ! what sorrow !!!* ’

“ Dante read in sombre characters over the gate of hell : *I am the work of primæval love.*” *

Besides these profound reflections, M. Vianney made others, not less powerful and striking :—

“ We are on earth as in a market—only for a while . . . We seem not to move, yet we are travelling swiftly towards eternity, as if by steam.

“ When a dying man was asked what inscription should be written on his tomb he answered : ‘ Put : *Here lies an infatuated man who left this world without knowing why he entered it.* ’ There are many who go hence without knowing what it was they came hither to do and without feeling any uneasiness. Let us not imitate them.

“ If the poor lost ones only had the time that we lose what good use they would make of it ! Had they but half-an-hour that half-hour would depopulate hell.

“ By death we make a restitution ; we give back to earth what she gave to us . . . A little pinch of dust the size of a nut, that is what we shall become. That is not much to be proud of !

“ For the body death is but a process of cleansing.

“ We must work while we are in this world ; we have to suffer and strive. We shall have all eternity to rest in.

“ If we understood our own good fortune we could almost call ourselves better off than the saints in heaven. *They are living on their savings ;* they cannot increase them ; whereas we, we can add to our treasure at every instant.

“ God’s Commandments are His instructions, given us to find

*To rear me was the task of power divine,
Supremest wisdom, and primæval love. (Dante, Hell, c. iii.)

the road to heaven, like the inscriptions at the ends of the streets and roads which tell us their names.

"Divine grace helps and sustains us on our way. It is as necessary to us as are crutches to those whose legs are failing them.

"When we go to confession we should understand what it is we are about to do. One can say that he is going to *take our Lord down from the Cross*.

"When you have made a good confession you have chained up the devil.

"The sins we conceal will every one of them re-appear. If we really want to hide our sins we must confess them properly.

"Our faults are but as a grain of sand compared with the immense mountain of the mercies of the good God."

M. Vianney made free use of comparisons and imagery in his instructions; he borrowed them from Nature, so well known and loved by those to whom he addressed himself, from descriptions of the country, from the emotions excited by rural life. The memories of his childhood had retained their freshness, and in these discourses of his old age he could not resist the innocent joy of living once again for the moment amid the scenes and sympathies of his youth. Following the precedent of our Lord, he took the most ordinary facts and everyday occurrences as illustrations of the spiritual life and made them the text for his instructions. The Gospel is full of symbols and figures calculated to lead the soul to an appreciation of the eternal truths by analogy between the beauties of the visible things of this world and the far greater beauties of the invisible things of the world to come. And in like manner there was no catechism in which the Curé of Ars did not make allusion to birds, fishes, brooks, trees, flowers, honey and similar familiar objects. All contemplatives have revelled in such language and showed a marked predilection for the delightful and beautiful things with which the Author of Creation has embellished His work. "A good man out of a good treasure bringeth forth good things," said our divine Lord (Matt. xii., 35). The writings of St. Francis of Sales are a model of this style, and one is not surprised to find such graces of language and refinement of taste in the Bishop of Geneva; but we may well wonder how it happened that the art came so naturally to a poor country curé. We continue:—

"Like a beautiful white bird that rises from the waste of waters and wings its flight over the dry land, so the Holy Spirit issues forth from the infinite ocean of the divine perfections to take up His abode in the souls of the pure in heart and kindle in them the fire of divine love.

"The Holy Spirit reposes in a pure soul as on a bed of roses.

"From the soul in which the Holy Spirit rests issues a perfume such as comes from the vine when it is in blossom.

"He who has preserved his baptismal innocence is as a child that has never disobeyed its father.

"When one has preserved one's innocence one feels as if borne above the things of earth as a bird is carried upwards by its wings.

"They who are pure of heart are as eagles and swallows which fly through the air . . . A pure-minded Christian is in this life like a bird attached to the ground by a string. Poor little bird ! It only waits for the string to be severed to fly away.

"Good Christians are like those birds which have large wings and small feet, and alight not upon the ground, lest they be unable to rise again or be captured. And they build their nests in high places, on the roofs of houses, on the summits of rocks. In like manner a Christian ought to be always in the upper air. The moment we abase our thoughts to earth we are taken.*

"A pure soul is like a fine pearl. As long as it is hidden in a shell in the depths of the sea, no one thinks of admiring it. But if you expose it to the light of day this pearl shines and attracts attention. It is thus that a pure soul now hidden from the eyes of the world will one day shine before the angels in the light of eternity.

"A pure soul is a fragrant rose, and the Three Divine Persons descend from heaven to inhale its perfume.

"The mercy of God is like a rushing torrent ; it sweeps away hearts in its headlong course.

"The good God will make more haste to pardon a repentant sinner than a mother to snatch her child from the fire.

"The elect are like the blades of corn that the reapers have missed and like bunches of grapes after the vintage.

"Imagine some poor mother compelled to let fall the knife of a guillotine on the neck of her child ; that is how the good God feels when He condemns a sinner.

"What a happiness for the just when, at the end of the world, the soul fragrant with the perfumes of heaven will go to seek its body, in order that it may rejoice for all eternity in the presence of God ! Then our bodies will come from the ground like linen from a laundry . . . The bodies of the just will shine in heaven like beautiful diamonds—globes of love !"

It is plain that the Curé of Ars was a poet without suspecting it, a poet in the highest and truest acceptation of the word ; that is to say, that lavishly dowered with gifts of heart, he always struck the right note in the right way. That is the simplest and best way of becoming a poet.

"Once," said he, "I was on my way to visit a sick person.

*. . . wherewith you catch flying souls . . . and I will let go the souls that you catch, the souls that should fly. (Ez. xiii., 20.)

It was spring and the bushes were full of little birds which rent the air with their song. I was pleased to listen to them and remarked to myself: 'Poor little birds, you don't know what you say! What a pity! You are singing the praises of God . . .'" A veritable echo of St. Francis of Assisi this!

M. Vianney delighted to retail the legend of St. Maurus, who, going one day to carry his dinner to St. Benedict, fell in with a large snake. He picked it up, put it under the flap of his robe and, showing it to St. Benedict, said: "See, Father, what I have found." When the other religious had gathered round the holy Patriarch the snake began to hiss and made as if to bite them. Then said St. Benedict: "Return, my child, and put that snake back where you found it." When St. Maurus had gone he added: "Brothers, do you understand why that reptile is so docile with that child? . . . It is because he has kept his baptismal innocence."

He would also dwell with complaisance on the story of St. Anthony preaching to the fishes, and that charming page in *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* lost nothing at his hands in the telling. "One day," said he, "St. Anthony was preaching in a province where there were a great many heretics. These unbelievers stopped their ears so as not to hear him. Then the Saint led the people to the sea-shore and summoned the fishes to come and hear the word of God, since men refused to do so. The fishes came to the edge of the water, the greater ones in rear of the lesser. St. Anthony put this question to them: 'Are you not grateful to the good God for having preserved you during the Deluge?' The fishes inclined their heads. Then said St. Anthony to the people: 'See, these fishes are sensible of God's benefits, while you, ingrates! you despise them!'"

M. Vianney used also to include reminiscences of his life as a shepherd.

"We ought to do the same as the shepherds who remain in the fields during the winter—life is nothing but a very long winter! They make a fire; but from time to time go to collect wood from all sides wherewith to feed it. Did we always take care to nourish our love of God by prayers and good works, it would never be extinguished within us.

"When you have not the love of God you are poor indeed. You are like a tree without flowers and without fruit.

"In the soul united with God it is always spring-time."

When he spoke of prayer the most pleasing and ingenious comparisons crowded to his lips:

"Prayer is as a sweet-smelling rose; but it needs a pure heart to appreciate this rose.

"There is a savoury flavour about prayer, such as is found in a ripe grape.

"Prayer disengages the soul from matter, bearing it upwards like the gas that inflates a balloon.

"The more one prays the more one desires to pray. Prayer is like a fish that swims on the surface at first, then, plunging beneath, it ever descends deeper and deeper. The soul plunges, sinks, and is lost in the delights of converse with God.

"Time does not hang heavy during prayer. I know not whether one would desire heaven the while . . . But yes! The fish swimming in the brook finds contentment, for it is in its own element, but it is still better off in the sea.

"When one prays one should open one's heart to God, like a fish when it sees a wave coming.

"The good God has no need of us. If He commands us to pray it is because He wishes our happiness and because our happiness can only be found there. When He sees us coming His heart comes out to meet us, like a father who inclines himself to hear the prattle of his child.

"In the morning we should imitate a child in its cradle. From the moment it opens its eyes it looks round for its mother. When it sees her it begins to smile; when it finds her not it weeps."

In speaking of the priest he would avail himself of this familiar and appropriate simile:

"The priest is for us as a mother, a nurse for a child of tender years: she gives it its food, it has only to open its mouth. A mother says to her child: 'Here, my child, eat.' The priest says to you: 'Take and eat; this is the Body of Jesus Christ. May it keep you and conduct you to eternal life.' O beautiful words! . . . A child, when it sees its mother, springs forward to her; it struggles against those who would restrain it; it opens its little mouth and stretches out its tiny hands to seize her. Your soul, in presence of the priest, would naturally go out to him—run to meet him; but, in the case of those who give rein to the senses, who only live for the *carcase*, she is withheld from him by the ties of the body. Our soul is bound up in our body, like the infant in its swaddling-clothes; one can see nothing but a shape."

Everyone must be struck with the truth and appositeness of this last illustration. Side by side with these graceful comparisons M. Vianney had others both original and vigorous. Did he desire to extol the benefits of the Sacrament of Penance, he did it by metaphor and apologue:—

"Once a raging wolf which devoured all, passed our way. Finding a child of two in his path, he took it between his teeth and carried it off. But some men who were pruning a vine attacked him and despoiled him of his prey. Thus it is that the Sacrament of Penance rescues us from the grasp of the devil."

When he would compare Christians with men of the world he did it thus:—

" I find no one so much to be pitied as these poor men of the world. They bear a mantle double-lined with thorns on their shoulders—not a movement can they make without pricking themselves ; while good Christians carry on them a cloak made of two thicknesses of rabbit-skin.

" The good Christian sets no store by the goods of this world ; he escapes from it like a rat from the waters.

" Unhappily our heart is not as pure and free from all terrestrial affections as it ought to be. Take a sponge, very clean and very dry and soak it in water, it will fill till it can hold no more. But if it be not clean and dry it will absorb nothing at all. And when the heart is not free and disengaged from worldly matters one soaks it in prayer in vain ; it takes up nothing.

" The heart of the wicked is a very swarm of vices. It is like a piece of meat that has gone bad and for which the worms now contend among themselves.

" When we give ourselves over to our passions we interlace thorns round our own heart.

" We are like moles a week old. No sooner do we see the light than we bury ourselves in the earth.

" The devil keeps us occupied up to the last moment, just as people keep a man occupied while they are waiting for the police to come and arrest him. When the police come he cries out, he is in desperation, but they do not let him go on that account.

" When a man dies he is often like a sheet of iron that has become rusty and must be passed through the fire.

" Poor sinners have become torpid like serpents in winter.

" The calumniator is like the caterpillar which, crawling over flowers, leaves its slime behind it and spoils them."

It is easy to see by these fragments that M. Vianney was of the school of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Bonaventure, the Blessed Suso and all those kindly contemplatives who did not disdain to deck out the austerity of their ideas in naïve graces of expression, possibly out of merciful condescension for their disciples, possibly from the natural attraction which those who are good feel for that which is beautiful. It is by no means so common or so easy as might be imagined, this love of nature ; her votaries must cease to think about themselves, regard the exterior world disinterestedly and respectfully, seeking not mere amusement but instruction. It is entirely erroneous to think that only those who misuse nature, love and understand her. These self-styled lovers of nature do but profane her. The Christian religion, so often accused of trampling nature under foot, has alone taught man to respect nature and love her as he should, by making plain the divine plan which sustains, irradiates and sanctifies her. It was this light that M. Vianney brought to his consideration of the visible creation ; he surveyed every aspect of it, to the end that he

might adore the evidences of his God therein. To his eye the Creator was as plainly visible in the least as in the most magnificent works of His hand. In peace with all the world and having in some sort re-attained to the state of primæval innocence of Eden, where Adam viewed all creatures in God and loved them with a fraternal charity, his heart overflowed with love, not only towards men but also to all other beings visible or invisible. One read into his words an affectionate sympathy for all creation, which without doubt appeared to him in all its original nobility and purity. In it he saw a sister who in her own fashion expressed his own thoughts and hymned the same love. We may recall his apostrophe to the birds. There, where many another eye would have seen nothing more than birds which perish, he discerned as with second sight affinities and harmonies which link together the moral and physical orders—the mysteries of nature with those of faith. The same was the case with him in the domain of history. Centuries, events and individuals were no more for him than symbols and allegories, prophecies and their fulfilment, voices that at once asked and replied, forms that mutually repeated themselves.

Nothing could be more pathetic than the application made by M. Vianney of the legend of St. Alexis to the Real Presence of our Lord. At the moment when the mother recognised her son in the inanimate body of the mendicant who had lived for thirty years on the steps of her palace, she cried: “O my son! would that I had recognised you sooner!” The soul at her departure from this life will then see Him whom she has possessed in the Eucharist, and at the remembrance of the consolations, the beauties and the riches she has ignored, will exclaim in like manner: “O Jesus! my life and my treasure! would that I had recognised you sooner!”

Sometimes the Curé of Ars would draw moral deductions and edifying considerations from passing events and circumstances that had impressed him personally; and although this was done with a certain reserve, from time to time one gathered lights concerning facts which, but for them, would have always remained unnoticed and unknown.

“Because our Lord does not permit Himself to appear in the most holy Sacrament in all His Majesty you conduct yourselves without reverence; but nevertheless it is He! He is in the midst of you . . . like that good bishop who was here just lately! . . . Everybody jostled him . . . Ah! if they had but known he was a bishop!”

“We give our youth to the devil and the remnant to the good God, who is so good that He will even be satisfied with that . . . Happily all are not like that. One of our recent visitors was a young lady belonging to one of the best families in France; she

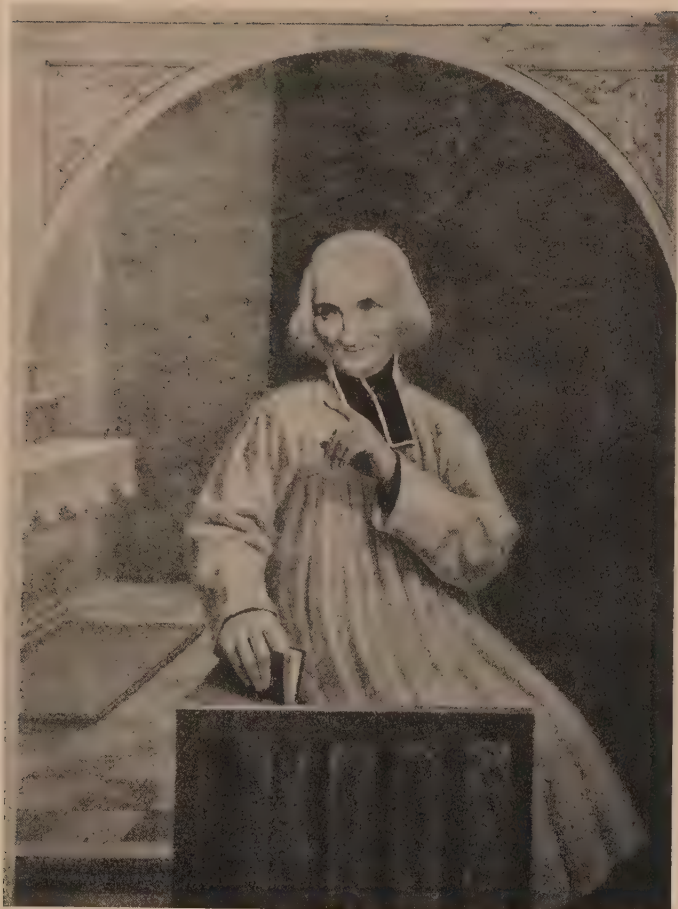
only left this morning. She is hardly twenty-three and is rich—very rich . . . She has offered herself as a sacrifice to the good God for the expiation of sins and the conversion of sinners. She wears a cincture with sharp points; she mortifies herself in a thousand ways; her parents know nothing about it. She is pale as a sheet of paper. She is a beautiful soul and very pleasing to God, like a few others up and down the world; it is they who fend off the end of all things.

“Some time back there came two Protestant ministers who did not believe in the Real Presence. I said to them: ‘Do you believe that a particle of bread can detach itself and of its own accord go and place itself on the tongue of one who comes to receive it?’ ‘No,’ was the reply. ‘Then it cannot be bread!’” Then M. Vianney continued: “I knew a man who had doubts about the Real Presence. He said: ‘What does one know about it? It is not certain. What is the consecration? What passes on the altar at that moment?’ But he wished to believe, and prayed to our Blessed Lady for faith. Now, pay attention to this. I do not say that it happened somewhere; I say that it happened to me. *At the moment when this man presented himself to receive Holy Communion the Sacred Host detached itself from my fingers while I was yet a considerable distance off and placed itself upon his tongue.*”

We shall not attempt any consideration of M. Vianney’s teaching taken as a whole. Though there was some sort of link between its various parts, there was none between the sudden inspirations and flashes of light with which it was interwoven. In general his catechisms defied analysis and we should be fearful of detracting from their effect by endeavours at reducing them to the unity of a theological system.

It had pleased God to impart to this holy priest all that was necessary for him to know himself and to teach others; and the purer his intention, the greater his detachment from worldly things and the less his dependence on the vain acquirements of men, the more complete was the work of the Holy Spirit within him—a block of marble when it is hewn and polished only awaits the chisel of the sculptor.

His faith served the Curé of Ars for all science, his book was the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. He sought no other wisdom than in Jesus Christ, His Cross and Death. For him no other wisdom was real and none profitable. And this wisdom he had acquired, as we have seen, not by researches in libraries or in the studies of the learned; it had only come to him through prayer before the tabernacle, in which he had passed his days and nights during the time when there was no pilgrimage to claim his almost undivided attention.



Villard-Vernu, Phot., Ars (Ain)

The Catechism.

CHAPTER XLI

THE VENERABLE CURÉ OF ARS IN HIS HOMILIES

The Lord shall give the word to them that preach good tidings with great power. (Ps. lxxvii., 12.)

And Elias the prophet stood up, as a fire, and his word burned like a torch. (Ecclus. xlviii., 1.)

EVERY Sunday, at the *Angelus*, parishioners and strangers alike crowded to the church at Ars. Even by anticipating the hour it was a work of exceeding difficulty to find a place amid the closely-packed crowd in which all classes and conditions were mixed and which, like the pilgrimage itself, presented a spectacle of the strangest and most strongly-marked contrasts. After an interval more or less prolonged which was filled in by the singing of hymns, the venerable Curé appeared, passing direct from his confessional to the pulpit, there to speak on the gospel of the day.

Those who only heard M. Vianney in his catechisms only half knew him. They knew that in his word was infused light, supernatural grace, solidity, clarity and, sometimes elevation, depth and originality; but it had not dawned upon them that there was also life, animation, warmth and unction. It was in his Sunday sermons that the missionary, the apostolic man, the oracle, the inspired prophet, the saint consumed with zeal for the salvation of souls showed himself under his rare and inimitable aspect in all the power and prestige of his imposing personality. The characteristics of these discourses were a mixture of exaltation and sensibility, of lively and ardent faith, of impetuous zeal, whence resulted the very highest power of unction in the preacher and in the hearer a degree of emotion no less marked. Thence arose the marvellous effects which have so often been observed at Ars: the change of hearts, the conquest of wills, softening and tears, the whole deep-seated work that commenced at the foot of the pulpit and was completed in the secrecy of the confessional.

In the Curé of Ars, to eloquence of voice was added eloquence of body—*quædam eloquentia corporis*, says Quintilian. The broad forehead, encircled with an aureola of white hair, the well-defined features, the beatific expression which formed the base of the whole physiognomy of the holy man and, above all, the mobile brilliancy of his glance which carried with it a species of supernatural fascination, before which we have often seen the proudest spirits bow themselves irresistibly and scepticism declare itself vanquished.

“On the day on which it was given us to hear M. Vianney,”

says the author of *Souvenirs de deux pèlerinages à Ars*, "he explained those words of the Gospel: 'Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God, and his justice, and all these things shall be added unto you.' What simplicity and elevation! A seraphic enthusiasm reigned in his words. Aided by admirable gestures, his voice excited compassion and tenderness; it was not the voice of a man, nor yet that of a woman or child, although it bore more resemblance to these two last. Coming from the head rather than the chest, it became so high and tremulous when M. Vianney became animated that it was impossible to prevent feeling an internal thrill oneself. Of order, method, form, able exposition, skilful co-ordination of thoughts, there was little to be found; but ardent faith, most touching expressions, outpouring of truth and transports of love, these there were in plenty, and the impression produced was unparalleled. All the while it was impossible not to recognise the soul of a saint acting without any other rule or measure than that of supernatural inspiration. And both words and phrases seemed to present themselves to his mind in such abundance that he arrived at a condition of being in some sort exhausted by his own zeal and to feel too much to be able to say enough.

"The congregation were exceedingly moved and often seemed to have entirely forgotten this world in order to fix their gaze on the other. The whole discourse suggested nothing but eternity. A hundred times he would repeat the same thing, and each time he would present it under a fresh aspect. Utterly unable to reproduce what he said, its effect remains with one nevertheless. The Curé of Ars did not reason; in demonstration he hardly employed recognised forms. A Gospel text was for him a fire to be stirred up; a light, the rays of which were to be focussed; a pure incense, the perfume of which he strove to intensify. Never a bitter reproach or sharp rebuke. Threats, rough apostrophe—those scourges of the tongue—were little to his liking. If he depicted the terrible realities of the next life it was by an exclamation of love that he finished. He preferred to dwell on the infinite mercy of God for man and His illimitable benevolence. Certain moments there were when one dared not look at him; pious curiosity was constrained to blush for itself and lower its eyes before his, overcome as by bashfulness even in veneration."

The manner of M. Vianney's homilies interested, captivated and instructed his hearers, whoever they might be. Nevertheless, we must confess that the eloquence of the holy Curé was void of those adventitious aids which count for much in the success of a preacher. Herein lies a proof of the supernatural force and celestial charm of the Gospel which, preached in all its simplicity, triumphs not less over the disabilities of the preacher than over the varied and often exaggerated demands of those who listen to him.

One of the most learned Christian orators of our times deplores that this method of instruction has fallen into disuse. "Since Bossuet," says he "whose sermons were nothing more than a continuation of the teaching of the Fathers in ordinary language, and with rare exceptions, the Gospel is only feebly explained or not explained at all. Some take but a single passage from the current gospel and hang thereon a highly imaginative moral discourse; others, looking only to the obvious or literal sense, make a monotonous, languid and frigid paraphrase, without interest and without anything that enlightens, moves or edifies. Thus the Gospel remains the Book of the Seven Seals—closed to the generality of Christians . . . What a mistake do they not make! Dogma and moral not only lose nothing by being presented in company with the mysteries of Jesus Christ, but they derive an admirable efficacy from it. The Prophet said, in words replete with meaning, that man must attain to a great elevation of spirit if God is to be glorified in him. That is to say that man must ascend from the region of the material to that of the spiritual; from earth to heaven, if he is to be initiated into the mysteries of things divine. Then it is that it becomes easy to inspire him with contempt of the world, hatred of evil and abnegation of self. But the easiest way of obtaining such a result is to preach Jesus Christ to him, the masterpiece of the wisdom and power of God, in whom are hidden all the treasures of infinite knowledge, to explain the Gospel to him after the style and method of St. Paul and the Fathers." (R.P. Ventura, *Les femmes de l'Évangile*).

The Curé of Ars did this. His Sunday sermons began with Jesus Christ and ended with Jesus Christ. His Master was ever before his eyes, ever on his lips, because He was ever in his heart.

On the feast of the Presentation, he said:—

"Have you thought of the love with which the heart of the aged Simeon was consumed during his ecstasy? For he must certainly have been in an ecstasy when he held the Infant Jesus in his arms. He had asked of the good God that he might see the Saviour of Israel, and the good God had promised he should do so. He passed fifty years in waiting, praying for this moment of promise and devoured by desire. When Mary and Joseph entered the temple God said to him: 'Behold Him!' . . . Then, taking in his arms, and pressing to his heart overflowing with love the Infant Jesus, who warmed that heart and inflamed it, the good old man cried: 'Now, Lord, let me die!' Then he returned Jesus to His Mother; he could only keep Him for a moment. But we, my brethren, are not we happier than Simeon? We can keep Him always, if we will . . . [He comes not only into our arms, but into our heart.

"O Man, how highly favoured art thou, but how little dost

thou comprehend thy good fortune ! Didst thou but comprehend thou couldst not continue to live . . . Oh ! no ; of a surety, thou couldst not live !” (Here tears choked the holy Curé’s utterance.) “ Thou wouldst die of love ! This God giveth Himself to thee . . . thou canst take Him with thee if thou dost so desire . . . wherever thou wilt . . . henceforth He is one with thee !”

The remainder of the sermon was nothing but a succession of exclamations interspersed with tears and sobs. Often it happened that the holy man was so much overcome by emotion that he was unable to proceed. Sometimes his discourse was no more than a continuous cry, a sublime cry of love, joy and pain. When he expounded the gospel of the Second Sunday in Lent, the raptures of the Apostles on Mount Thabor re-awoke in him the idea of the happiness of the soul called to rejoice in the sacred humanity of our Lord by the unclouded vision of heaven and, carried out of himself, he exclaimed : “ We shall see Him ! we shall see Him ! . . . O my brethren, have you never thought of it ? We shall see God ! we shall see Him in very truth ! we shall see Him as He is . . . face to face !” And, for a whole quarter of an hour, he ceased not to weep and repeat : “ We shall see Him !!!”

On another occasion he had taken as the subject for his instruction the Last Judgment and, suddenly pausing at the words of the terrible sentence : “ Depart, ye cursed !” he burst into tears and could only repeat : “ Accursed of God ! do you understand that, my brethren, accursed of a God who only desires to bless ! Accursed of a God who wishes nothing better than to love and pardon ! Accursed, accursed without hope of remission ! accursed for evermore ! Ah ! what a horrible doom !!!” His hearers were overwhelmed.

Sometimes his discourses took their colour from passing events and were a reflection of the joys and sorrows that passed over his own soul. Thus, in 1849, he said :

“ It would seem that in the absence of His Vicar our Lord Himself has come upon earth once more and resumed His humanity to reveal Himself to man. You have heard tell of the new miracle lately wrought in Rome. They had exposed the veil with which St. Veronica wiped the sacred countenance of our Lord, but the impression on which had been almost obliterated by time. While the cardinals were kneeling before this holy relic the Holy Face, sad and covered with tears, was seen to re-appear. There are some who will not believe it : it is idle to explain colour to the blind ! By this apparition and those tears our Lord would say to the cardinals : ‘ Where is my son, your Father ? They have driven him away : where is he ?’

“ As Mary said to Peter after the death of Jesus : ‘ Where is

your Father and my Son? I no longer see Him.' Our Lord has mourned His Vicar like one who has lost a son, like a husband bereft of his wife. He has wrought this miracle in favour of the Pope. How holy a Pope should be! And what alms so pleasing to God as that offered to the Holy Father! You will always have the poor with you, but you will not always have the opportunity of giving to the holy Father. You will receive a share of his holy prayers. Our Lord has ever shown a deference towards His Vicar: he is the depository of all His treasures. Also you can do nothing more pleasing to God than to pray for the Pope, that he may be restored to his dominions. That is what Jesus Christ asks of us by those tears."

In 1830, having heard that in some parts of France the Crucifixes had been thrown down, he cried, with a motion of sublime indignation which profoundly impressed his hearers:

"They will try in vain; they will try in vain! The Cross is stronger than they, and they will not overturn it always. When our Lord appears in the clouds of heaven they will not wrest it from His hands!"

Three years later the vengeance of God came. Paris and Marseilles had a visitation of cholera, and the same was threatened in Lyons. The Curé of Ars commenced his instruction with these grave words: "Brethren, God has set about cleansing the world." It is said that an artist who happened to be among the congregation was so powerfully moved by these simple words and the tone in which they were uttered that they were the starting-point of his conversion.

We quote some further fragments of M. Vianney's homilies:—

"In the gospel of to-day, my brethren, we read that the master of a field had sown grain on good ground and while he slept the enemy over-sowed it with tares. This signifies that God created man good and perfect, but the enemy came and disseminated sin . . . Behold the Fall of Adam: terrible Fall that opened the heart of man to sin . . . Behold the mingling of good and evil; sin is found in the midst of virtue . . .

"Thé tares must be rooted out, you say? No, replies our Lord, lest in rooting out the tares you also root up the good grain. Wait till the harvest . . . Man's heart must remain thus to the end; a mixture of good and evil, of vice and virtue, of light and darkness, of good grain and tares . . . The good God has not willed that this mixture should be un-made and a human nature re-created in which nought but good grain shall be. He wills that we should struggle, that we should labour to hinder the tares from permeating the whole man.

"The devil indeed comes to sow temptations about our path; but by grace we are enabled to overcome him. We can choke the tares . . . Tares: that is, above all, impurity and pride. 'With-

out impurity and pride,' says St. Augustine, 'there would not be any great merit in resisting temptation.'

"Three things are absolutely necessary in our warfare with temptation: prayer to enlighten us, the sacraments to strengthen us, and vigilance to guard us . . . Happy the tempted souls! It is when the devil sees that a soul tends to union with God that his fury is redoubled . . . O happy union! . . ."

(The rest of the homily was drowned in a flood of cries of admiration on the sweetness of the interior life and union with God).

He explained the parable of the labourers in the vineyard thus:—

"This day's gospel, my brethren, tells us how a householder went out very early one morning in order to find labourers to work in his vineyard . . . There was nobody in the vineyard already then? Yes, brethren, there was the most Blessed Virgin Mary, who was born there . . . What is this vineyard? It is grace and the Blessed Virgin was born there because she was conceived without sin.

"As for ourselves, we have been called there. The householder has sought us, but the holy Virgin was there always . . . Oh! the beautiful workwoman! The good God could create a better world than the present one, but He could not call into existence a more perfect creature than Mary . . . She is the tower erected in the middle of the Lord's vineyard . . .

"Look, my children, here is a feeble comparison. You know those tiny eggs of the sea, from which emerge little fishes that cleave the waters with such astonishing swiftness . . . In the same way the Blessed Virgin from the first instant of her creation possessed the plenitude of grace and passed through life in its vast ocean . . .

"Besides the Blessed Virgin there was someone who was for a moment outside the vineyard, but not for long—St. John the Baptist. Everybody else only entered after John the Baptist, and the householder had to go forth to seek them.

"Who were the labourers of the first hour? Such as St. Aloysius Gonzaga, St. Stanislaus Kostka, St. Colette . . . All who entered the vineyard by holy baptism and have never left it, because they have preserved their innocence . . . Happy the souls who can say to the good God: 'Lord, I have always belonged to you!' Ah! how lovely to give one's youth to God! What a source of joy and happiness!

"Next come those who give themselves to God in the prime of life. These can yet turn sincerely to God and remain good and faithful labourers in the vineyard of the Lord . . . But the poor obdurate sinners who pass their life far from God, who come to work in His vineyard when they can do nothing else, who wait to

have done with sin until sin has done with them . . . Oh ! how they are to be commiserated ! When a man has revelled for years and years in evil, when he has contentedly rolled in the mire of sin, it requires a miracle to extricate him from it. My brethren, let us ask this miracle for them . . .”

We seem to recognise in this style—so simple and marvelously appropriate to a country congregation—the method of the ancient Fathers, their wide and luminous manner of interpreting the Gospel and developing its meaning, not halting at the mere letter, but penetrating to the mysteries it contains, revealing the treasures of love and wisdom concealed within, their setting forth of the harmony between the Old and New Testaments, the fulfilment of prophecies, the bearing of the past on the future, the connexion of dogma with precept. The beauty of the comparison of the little fishes which, newly hatched, forthwith scour the depths of the sea, with the Blessed Virgin, immersed from her birth in the ocean of divine grace, will have escaped no one.

On the last Sunday of the year, M. Vianney said :

“ The world is passing, we are passing with it. Kings, emperors are all going hence. Eternity will receive them ; that eternity whence is no return. There is only one thing needful : to save one’s poor soul.

“ Think of the saints ; they were not attached to the things of earth ; they only thought of the things of heaven. Worldlings, on the contrary, think of nothing but the present.

“ A good Christian acts like one who goes to a foreign country to amass a fortune. He has no idea of remaining there, but wishes for nothing better than to return home directly his fortune is made. Again, we should do as kings do. When they are likely to be dethroned they send their treasure away beforehand ; it awaits them when they go. In like manner a good Christian sends all his good works to await him at the gate of heaven.

“ The good God has placed us on earth to see how we conduct ourselves, and whether we will love Him or no ; but nobody can remain here. If we only reflected we should turn our thoughts unceasingly towards heaven, our true fatherland. But we permit ourselves to be diverted from that by the world, its riches and the allurements of material things ; and we pay no attention to the only thing with which we should be occupied.

“ Look at the saints : how they were detached from the world and from matter ! with what contempt they regarded it all ! A religious having lost his parents, found himself lord of vast possessions. When they brought him the news he asked : ‘ How long have my parents been dead ? ’ ‘ Three weeks,’ was the answer. ‘ Tell me,’ said he, ‘ is a dead man capable of inheritance ? ’ ‘ Assuredly not.’ ‘ Well then, I cannot inherit from those who have only been dead three weeks, for I have been dead

twenty years.' Ah! the saints understood the nothingness, the vanity of this world and the happiness of leaving all things for the sake of heaven.

"There are two kinds of misers; the heavenly miser and the earthly one. The miser of earth has no thought beyond the present; he is never rich enough; he amasses, amasses—ever amasses. But when death comes he has nothing. I often say that he is just in the same position as those who lay in too much for the winter; when the next harvest comes they are at a loss what to do with it all, it is only in the way. Similarly when death approaches the goods of this life are nothing but an embarrassment. We can take nothing with us; we must leave it all behind. What would you think of a person who heaped up provisions in the house which would have to be thrown away later because they were spoiling, and who passed by precious stones, gold and diamonds that he could keep, carry with him wherever he went, and would make his fortune? . . . Well, my children, we do the same nevertheless: we attach ourselves to matter, to things which must come to an end, and give no thought to gaining heaven—the only prize worth having.

"A good Christian, the miser of heaven, makes but little of the good things of earth; he thinks only of enriching his soul, of acquiring what will satisfy for ever and will endure for all eternity.

"Pass from country to country, from kingdom to kingdom, from riches to affluence still greater, from one pleasure to another and you will not find your happiness in them. Earth can no more satisfy an immortal soul than a pinch of flour a starving man.

"When the Apostles had beheld our Lord ascending into heaven they found earth so poor, so vile and so contemptible without Him, that they longed for the torments which should tear them from it and unite them once more to their good Master. The mother of the Machabees, who endured a seven-fold death in the sight of the death of her seven sons, encouraged them with the words: 'Think of heaven!' . . .

"Our Lord rewarded the faith of the saints by the sensible vision of heaven. Some there were among them who walked with Him in paradise. St. Stephen while he was being stoned beheld the heavens open above his head. St. Paul was rapt to the third heaven and declared himself unable to give an idea of what he saw there. St. Teresa saw into heaven and avowed that all things earthly seemed as ordure by comparison.

"But we, alas! we are nought but matter. We crawl the earth and know not how to raise ourselves above it. We are too heavy, too sluggish.

"Turn then, my children, to these consoling thoughts. With whom shall we be in heaven? With God who is our Father;

with Jesus Christ who is our Brother ; with the Blessed Virgin, who is our Mother ; with the angels and saints who are our friends.

“ A king said, regretfully, in his last moments : ‘ I have now to leave my kingdom for a country in which I know no one ! ’ That is, that he had never thought of the happiness of heaven. We must, then, make to ourselves friends there now, so as to meet them again after death, and we need have no fear that we, like that king, shall know no one.”

These are only incomplete analyses, but they have at least the merit of fidelity. They reproduce the thought and sometimes the expression ; they are sufficient to convey an idea of this kind of preaching. It is no matter for astonishment that among souls nourished with such substantial food some should be found who are firm in faith, well-instructed in their religion, and fervent and zealous in the practice of it. The love of our Lord is the foundation of all virtue ; it is a celestial fire that warms, purifies and sanctifies the soul. And the surest method of kindling this fire in the hearts of the faithful is to explain the Gospel to them—that book in every line of which our Saviour shows Himself as the Friend and Consoler of His people, and invites Man to devote himself entirely to Him, by responding to the love that has been so freely poured out upon the human race.

CHAPTER XLII

PORTRAIT OF M. VIANNEY

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Christ Jesus. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency may be of the power of God, and not of us. (II. Cor. iv., 6-7.)

THE VENERABLE Curé of Ars presented in his person all the marks that go to form—if it is permitted to call it so—the physiognomy of a saint. Sanctity is more often than not accompanied by external signs, the import of which is arrived at rather by intuition than by analysis. The salient feature of this order of phenomena is the sensible presence of the divine element in a human personality. Sanctity is nothing else than the life of Jesus Christ in a man, transforming and, so to speak, deifying him in advance ; causing him to appear now in some sort such as he will be one day when the Lord shall come in His glory, and we, beholding shall be “ transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord ” (II. Cor. iii., 18). This luminous transformation has already commenced in the Christian who, by reproducing in himself the image of the Son of God, arrives at the point where he can say : “ And I live, now not I ; but Christ liveth in me ” (Gal. ii., 20). The saint carries Jesus Christ with him, not only in his soul but also in his body. Jesus Christ breathes in his thoughts, in his feelings, in his actions and even in the features of his face, which reproduce, as much as is possible in a human countenance, the dignity, grace and amiability of our Saviour ; so that the entire person of the saint becomes like unto a crystal pure and unclouded, behind which can be clearly discerned the grand and divine figure of Christ our Lord : “ the life also of Jesus is made manifest in our bodies ” (II. Cor. iv., 10).

This fact alone renders the divine action evident and palpable to observation and experience. It is the radiation of grace, the fusion of the natural and supernatural orders—the divine manifesting itself through the veils of the flesh. And such is the power of this manifestation that the most complete strangers to anything in the nature of religious emotion yield to the ascendancy exercised by the saints. The ordinary person likewise recognises these superior beings by some indefinable signs, and admires without understanding, just as those born blind feel the rays of the sun without seeing them.

The Curé of Ars was favoured in a very high degree with this marvellous gift of appearing to the eyes of all as an image of

Jesus Christ. At sight of him one was reminded of the eulogy of Père de Condren, made by M. Olier : " He was no more than a semblance and shadow of what he appeared to be. He was like a host on the altar ; externally one sees the accidents and appearance of bread, but within is Jesus Christ " (*Mém. aut. de M. Olier*, t. I., p. 23). The same might be said of our great servant of God. Within him was quite another self—the interior of Jesus Christ and His hidden life. This explains his astonishing power over hearts. Without adverting to the fact, without knowing it and without willing it, this man, so insignificant of bodily presence, drew all within his sphere of influence. One would have almost credited him with a system like the stars, in which, by his own motion, he caused the thoughts and affections of his satellites to gravitate towards himself. When once one had met his glance or heard him speak, that glance and that speech fascinated you. The eye remained blind and the ear deaf to everything else ; if one looked one did not see ; if one listened one did not understand. Men of the world, accustomed to yielding to other allurements, have often avowed that since they had approached the Curé of Ars his image had never left them, the remembrance of him haunted them everywhere, they could not think of anything else. It would be difficult, in effect, to picture to oneself a figure that awoke more vividly in the mind the idea of a saint.

A writer of our days has pretended that modern saints were vulgar and by no means corresponded with the artistic ideal. The *Journal des Débats* published a few years since an article by M. Renan that made some sensation. The author commented on the banality of modern saints, whom he found " absolutely lacking in the impressive appearance, the air of distinction and loftiness of spirit which characterised the saints of the old school . . . It is a species of poesy that has vanished. The faculty that created legends has been withdrawn from humanity." And he proceeds to announce formally that the saint as heretofore conceived by the world will never be seen again. " This more than venturesome theory," says M. Louis Lacroix, " recurred to my mind at the moment when I had this sublime scene " (the catechism of the holy Curé, described by M. Lacroix in chapter xxviii) " under my very eyes, and in which I was lost in admiration of the ideal beauty of him who was the principal figure in it. It appeared to me to be completely refuted. For the expression of pitiless mortification and exquisite charity was not less apparent in the physiognomy of the ascetic Curé of Ars than the beauty we have associated with the saints of former times. Certain it is that the Church has a higher mission than that of satisfying the artistic fantasies of those who would seek æsthetic standards in the countenance of sanctity ; but, even in this entirely secondary matter, I can affirm

that she has not failed to attain to the standard of their requirements. For if the critic in question had had the happy thought of coming here and studying the figure of the Curé of Ars I am assured that he would have declared himself satisfied and would have recognised that the Church can still bring forth the beautiful in the same manner as she continues to produce that which is good and true."

Art has laid down a special type, at once single and multiplex, of that which constitutes its ideal of beauty. It has defined the beautiful, the splendour of the true; we may add that there is also the splendour of the good. Now, the good, unquestionably and before all, consists in the holy. This explains why a countenance simple and homely in detail but illuminated by the divine light of sanctity should have made such a profound impression on every heart and caused them to see in the figure of the servant of God something of the superhumanly beautiful.

And why should there be anything strange in this? Is not the saint a man who carries out the moral laws of his being in the heroic degree? Is not the veritable law of a human being, that he should correspond to the vocation that has been given him and reach forward to the end for which he is destined? And is not this exact correspondence, which implies rule and order, in itself a harmony, a beauty? And has not the Author of all virtue, who co-ordinates all things in His infinite wisdom, naturally attached to this heroic practice of good certain sensible consequences; to wit, marks capable of determining and differentiating its degrees, to serve both as an encouragement and reward? This being so, it is these special marks that constitute in the heroically faithful man what is called the aureole of sanctity.

Thus, by the very designs of Providence, it is becoming that the saint should have an aspect and physiognomy that distinguishes and characterises him. The transformed soul brings a blessing on her corporeal envelope and transforms it. How could it be otherwise? How could it be that temperance—which maintains the body in the conditions most favourable to the equilibrium of the passions and removes it from the very varied causes of morbid affections—habitual peace of mind, intimate communion with God, and entire self-possession, should not set an essential stamp on the human personality? Görres pushes his deductions on this matter very far; nor was he mistaken. How could it be that God on His part should not set the seal of His approval on these heroic results of devotion to duty? Whoever has seen a saint will be convinced of it, and whoever has seen M. Vianney will have found in him an admirable instance of this exterior sign of sanctity. Whoever has witnessed his abstinence, the inexorable frugality of his life; his work, which would have provided occupation for several zealous men; or heard his

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voice, so feeble yet so animated ; or noticed the frailness of his entire person, apparently so worn out, but in reality so full of life ; the absence of infirmities in a body that seemed a ready receptacle for all the weaknesses, must have been convinced of the advantages—even in the exterior and physical order—of a rigorous conformity of man's will to the laws laid down for him by divine Providence.

M. Vianney was of small stature, his figure was slender and his appearance, without excluding the idea of a certain amount of vigour, indicated an eminently nervous temperament. Age and labour had availed nothing to deprive his limbs of their suppleness and elasticity ; he had the energy and agility of youth and his every movement was prompt and decided. In all this one could not fail to trace the results of a childhood passed amid the virile occupations of a rural existence. To his last hour he retained, by a rare privilege, the perfect use of all the mental and bodily faculties essential to the accomplishment of his mission. His hearing was as keen, his vision as clear and his memory as fresh as they had ever been. He was a continual illustration of the axiom that " the soul recruited from sources beyond becomes an agent for the revival and recuperation of its own body." Nevertheless, his body had arrived at such a state of emaciation that it might almost have been thought to be immaterial—" a spiritual body," as St. Paul terms it. (1. Cor. xv., 44). The *soutane* of the Curé of Ars appeared to have nothing inside it. His walk, though heavy, was rapid—the walk of one who counts the minutes and who, albeit exhausted, nevertheless hastens to pursue his labours in God's service. His face—elongated, angular and pale from fasts and vigils—was inclined forward and his chin rested lightly on his chest, from his habitual attitude of adoration and recollection. His hair remained abundant and flowing to the end, forming a white aureola encircling a calm, expressive and dignified countenance, in which were possibly discernible even yet traces of the pristine ruggedness of the peasant—but a ruggedness long since softened and tempered by benevolence. In this meagre and wasted countenance appeared nothing human or terrestrial—only the seal of divine grace ; it was more like the fragile and diaphanous covering of a soul no longer of earth. The eyes were the most expressive feature, and they shone with incomparable brightness. They dilated and flashed fire when the holy Curé enlarged on the love of God ; they were veiled behind a mist of tears when he spoke of sin. But it is not less remarkable than admirable to note that that glance alternately piercing and gentle, terrible and caressing, naïve and profound ; which had in it all that mysterious power and attractive candour which our Lord not seldom accords to those who often lift up their eyes to Him ; which read the secrets of hearts, and under which the gaze of

others often fell, that glance had never been known to frighten anyone.

Next to the eyes the profile was the most notable feature in the Curé of Ars. Its lines were dignified, harmonious and clearly defined. Although the sweetness and serenity of the countenance told of the heavenly peace that reigned within, its prevailing expression when in repose was one of supernatural melancholy. Incessant contact with sinners and sorrows fostered this disposition and frequently plunged him into painful reflection, and its depressing influence would then appear in his face which was, not only a true but also a most delicate indicator of the inner workings of his mind. But when he emerged from his recollection to converse with others he appeared "graciously adorned of the Holy Spirit," as one of the earliest Fathers puts it; and smiled benevolently on all around with a smile that seemed to beam forth from every feature.

The astonishing resemblance that the *mask* of M. Vianney presented to that of Voltaire has been universally remarked. We say the *mask*, because, apart from the general outline of the features, there was no similarity whatever. Did one compare a bust of the Curé of Ars with the bust in the antechamber of the Chateau de Ferney the likeness would be striking. But not less striking would be the contrast between their expressions. "Some human countenances," says Père Gratry, "appear unconstrained and luminous . . . their look is simple, open and trustful as from the charity that inspires it. Others appear disingenuous and constrained by some avid passion which dominates them and brings wretchedness in its train. The first are transparent and candid; the second enigmatic, complex, inscrutable. These last horrify and repel. The smallest child in its innocence and simplicity seems to suspect them. But the others attract and children willingly leave their nurse to nestle confidently in their arms. . . . Simplicity in look and face! Duplicity in face and look! Look proud and voluptuous: ugliness laughable and contemptible if the failings proceed from weakness; satanic ugliness if they have their root in depravity! Look limpid and pure, overflowing with love and goodness: beauty gracious if coming from a merely natural source; beauty divine if animated by supernatural principles! By *look* I mean *expression*; I mean what the Gospel does when it says: 'If thine eye be single . . .' I am speaking of the soul as manifested through the body." (*Connaissance de l'âme*). No words could better describe the contrast presented by these two, the saintly Curé of Ars and the impious old man of Ferney, in spite of a certain superficial resemblance. Is it not truly remarkable that, in the same country and only a hundred years apart, two men should have attained a renown so brilliant by means so diverse? that their memory should be con-

nected with two villages which, unheard-of before, have become famous since ; and that these two men, who personified the love and hatred of Jesus Christ in a very eminent degree, should present the resemblance to which we have alluded ? The eighteenth century rushed to Ferney, the nineteenth hastened to Ars. Indications to the contrary notwithstanding, despite the failures that disfigure the present and the clouds which darken the future, it may be permitted to us to see in this fact a triumph for truth in our time. Ars has been the reaction from Ferney. We may add that while Ferney has quickly forgotten all about her Voltaire, Ars is not likely to forget her Curé. For years to come, not only Ars but the whole world will talk of the humble priest, tell of his works, extol his virtues, glorify his memory and his portrait will be kept and honoured in places where neither that of Voltaire nor any other personage of our age will ever be seen. All things that are here esteemed as the greatest, most beautiful and most enduring will have perished, but the Curé of Ars will live—live in the remembrance promised to the just and which is their recompense in time : forerunner of that of eternity.

CHAPTER XLIII

NATURAL QUALITIES OF M. VIANNEY. HIS VIVACITY OF SPIRIT AND GRACES OF CONVERSATION

Let your speech be always in grace seasoned with salt : that you may know
ow you ought to answer every man. (Col. iv., 6.)

It would be a great mistake to imagine that holiness hinders the development of natural qualities, stifles capacity for thought and is incompatible with breadth of mind, nobility of character and warmth of feeling. This paradox has been repeated times without number, to the scandal of weaker brethren who are half inclined to believe it, and even to the discomfort of the stronger sort. The very words *devotion* and *piety* have come to have an unpleasant ring in the ears of the worldly-minded, as of something or someone exaggerated, possibly contemptible. As if the best and noblest faculties of man could but lose by submission to the discipline of the Christian religion, and could only gain by yielding to the forces of disorder ! Whereas the contrary is the truth. Habitual union with God by prayer and love, continual victory of the angel over the animal, the permanent triumph of good over evil called the state of grace, produce as good and even better reactions and sensible effects in the intellectual part of our being than they do in the inferior part thereof. The soul's health being assured, its beauty, strength, grandeur and dignity are free to assert themselves and increase. Sacrifice, which is the foundation of Christian *morale* and the last word of the Gospel, is also the law of the moral and intellectual improvement that man effects in himself when he strives after sanctity. It is the impulse of the soul which, developing itself along the highest and best lines, aspires to the glorious liberty of the children of God. Until we have by a sincere acceptance of the doctrine of sacrifice freely renounced every created object liberty of soul is but a name. We are free as a bird tied by a string ; as long as it does not want to fly it may think itself free, but let it only try to pass the limits assigned to it by a stronger and alien will it at once perceives it is a prisoner. Such is the liberty that creatures and attachment to them leave us. We shall be truly free only when the love of Jesus Christ shall have freed us. (John viii., 36). This love does not devastate the heart as do the passions ; nor does it suppress anything therein that is well ordered. The sunlight passing through the stained glass windows of the cathedral floods the building ; it illuminates, colours, embellishes everything within, but it destroys nothing. The love of Jesus Christ in man's heart

is a ray of sunshine in a holy place. Hence the singular charm found in the soul calmed and satisfied by this love, a charm at once the gentlest and most powerful conceivable—the fire hidden beneath the ashes and become more pure and luminous by self-devotion.

Some do not expect to find a noble and generous heart or a high degree of intelligence in those who have consecrated themselves to God. There is no more egregious error! As if the ideal of all that is noble were not evolved by the struggle of conflicting human passions with an exalted and imperious sense of duty! As if sanctity, by removing the limitations that straiten the soul's horizon and keep it captive in the shades of time, and thus setting it free to seek higher and better things than those of earth, were not ennobling and energising its intellectual faculties! The breaking of bonds and removal of obstacles does not imply the cutting off of every affection and suppression of all liberty: it is not the drying up of the sources, but their sanctification. Sanctity does not wither what she touches; she elevates and purifies it; she augments the good dispositions that nature has bestowed by an increase of wisdom and ghostly strength—which are the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

This intellectual improvement, this supplementation of the human faculties was very striking in M. Vianney. We have followed his career from youth upwards and it must be perfectly clear that he had had neither time nor opportunity of acquiring an extended knowledge of men and things. But in their place he had the gift of faith in all its fulness; a profound insight into the ways of God and the miseries of man; remarkable discernment, which led him to prompt and accurate conclusions, together with an admirable practical wisdom. He was, besides, endowed with a preternatural memory, exquisite tact and a faculty of observation which would have been alarming to those with whom he came in contact, had they not recognised that his immense charity always tempered his judgments with indulgence.

"There is sanctity in the Curé of Ars," someone ventured to remark in presence of a learned professor of philosophy, "but there is nothing else." "There is," retorted the professor, "not only illumination, but very remarkable illumination . . . It appears in his conversation on every manner of subject—on God, on man, on things, on the present and on the future . . . Oh! how clearly one sees when one does so by the light of the Holy Spirit! to what heights does faith elevate our perception and our reason!"

Although absorbed by prayer, the duties of his ministry, instruction and direction, the Curé of Ars was by no means indifferent to any matter that directly or indirectly concerned the religious or social welfare of the people. On many questions indeed, as yet undecided in the minds of the most able, he held

very clear and decided opinions—opinions always arrived at by considering the matter from the point of view of the glory of God and salvation of souls.

At the conclusion of an interview with M. Vianney a very distinguished man wrote: "We have particularly admired the *progressive* spirit of your Saint. There is nothing like sanctity to elevate to their highest the ideas of the very humblest of men!"

Again, this man, cut off from all human enjoyment; who had never known the pleasures of social life nor the amenities of polite society; who had abandoned himself so completely to the practice of renunciation; this man whose entire existence was passed in the seclusion of a confessional, might he not be expected to take a narrow and severe view of things? And would it be possible that the austerity of his soul should leave any room at all for kindness and indulgence?

Another error this! The Curé of Ars, so hard to himself, who bore about his person the marks of most terrible penance, the Curé of Ars was amiable and knew how to smile; he was charming and gracious of speech and witty in repartee. From his lips issued truth and consolation in their most attractive form. When he found himself in company with priests or with people whom he knew and loved he delighted to expand. A complete record of the intimate conversations of the Curé of Ars would make delightful reading; but even if the materials were available, it would be beyond our power to reproduce the manner. A smile cannot be portrayed in words, and the converse of the holy man was as the continual smile of his soul. Though he never laughed, this smile always hovered upon his lips, encouraging gaiety, inviting confidence and banishing constraint. The Spirit of God which dwelt in him lent a directness, simplicity and an incomparable appositeness to his lightest words. The best and happiest words are those that come from the heart. As M. Vianney was endowed with an exquisite sensibility of heart, this quite naturally found its ready expression in his words and imparted life, warmth and colour to everything he said.

Thus, the servant of God long mourned Mademoiselle d'Ars and held her memory in most affectionate veneration. When he went to pay his respects to the new occupants of the château for the first time he gave vent to his grief before them. "Poor lady!" he said, "how sad it is not to see her in her accustomed seat in the church!" Then, fearing he had been lacking in delicacy towards the heirs of his benefactress, he hastened to reproach himself for his sensibility and, drying his tears, he added with supreme tact: "But, nevertheless! . . . we are very wrong to complain. The good God has treated us as He treated His chosen people; when He withdrew Moses He left them Josue and Caleb." A short time afterwards, in acknowledging the New Year's greet-

ings of this family, who had very soon found a place in his affections by the side of Mademoiselle d'Ars, he said : " I only wish I were St. Peter, that I might give you the keys of paradise."

His well-beloved parishioners having presented some of their numerous relations to him, asking a special blessing on their behalf, the holy Curé gave it graciously with the words : " Oh! the relations of M. des Garets are already blessed !"

To Mgr. de Langalerie, who on one of his frequent visits had said to him with the grace that characterised his very least actions : " My good Curé, you will kindly permit me to say Mass in your church ?" he replied, amiably : " Monseigneur, I am sorry it is not Christmas-day, that you might say three."

When Père Hermann appeared at Ars for the first time it was proposed that he should preach. M. Vianney suggested that he should give the catechism in his place. The Father could not be prevailed upon to accept either offer, but consented—and this was a great trial for his humility—to say a few words when the servant of God had finished. M. Vianney gave his instruction as usual and concluded in this fashion : " My children, there was once a good saint who had a great desire to hear the Blessed Virgin sing. Our Lord, who delights to give pleasure to those that love Him, deigned to accord him this favour. So a beautiful lady presented herself and began to sing in his presence. He had never heard such a sweet voice ; he was enraptured and cried : ' Enough ! enough ! if you continue, I shall die !' The lady replied : ' Not so fast ! not so fast ! to admire my voice for what you have heard is nothing. I am but the Virgin Catherine, and you have yet to hear the Mother of God.' And, in effect, the Blessed Virgin sang in her turn. And her song was beautiful ; so beautiful ! that the saint swooned and expired with delight—drowned in an ecstasy of love ! Well, my children, something of the same sort is going to happen to-day : you have just heard St. Catherine ; now you shall hear our Blessed Lady."

Mgr. de Ségur came to Ars and was instantly smitten with the charms of the pilgrimage. Nor did it take M. Vianney much longer to appreciate the beautiful soul of the pilgrim and, after an interview which on both sides was nothing more than an effusion of faith and the love of God, he remarked : " Mgr. de Ségur may be blind, but he is one of those blind who see very clearly."

When Mgr. Chalandon visited the parish of Ars for the first time someone told the Curé that he ought to say something complimentary to the prelate. Accordingly he improvised this little harangue on the spot :

" Monseigneur, the days on which your saintly predecessor visited our parish were days of benediction. This is not surprising for : *When the saints pass, God passes with them.* We have lost nothing, Monseigneur ; on the contrary, we have gained, since

Mgr. Devie blesses us from heaven while you, whom he chose to carry on his work, you bless us on earth. Bless us, Monseigneur, bless the pastor, bless the flock, to the end that we may always love the good God."

A priest, recently appointed to the Mission, was presented to M. Vianney with the remark that he was the youngest of all. "You are very fortunate, my friend," said he, as he embraced him; "you have a long time before you in which to serve the good Master. In the Apostolic College, our Lord had a special affection for St. James the Less, because he was the youngest."

This same missionary went to Lyons, to take part in the procession on the festival of Corpus Christi. On his return, the Curé, perceiving him, remarked: "Once upon a time there was a saint who disappeared on the eve of all the great feasts and was no more seen till the day after. He went to keep the feast in paradise . . . I fancy, my dear comrade, that you must do the same thing."

Wishing to show the companions of his labours the esteem in which he held their services, he said: "The good God has reserved my white bread for my declining years. He knows that we poor old creatures need something soft to eat. He treats me as our Lord treated the guests at the marriage at Cana."

M. Vianney begged urgently to be allowed to provide the crosses that the missionaries received when they took their vows: "Let me do it," said he. "I have so many crosses of my own that I can well spare some for my friends."

After a sermon that had greatly pleased him, he said to the preacher, while affectionately taking both his hands in his own: "Ah! our vessels are too small to receive and hold such beautiful things!"

A Lazarist from Valfleury asked him if one of their Fathers, recently afflicted with paralysis, would be ever able to preach again. "Yes, my friend," he replied, "he will always preach. The sermons of saints are their example."

Someone reminded M. Vianney of the saying of a Parisian gentleman: "Sœur Rosalie was my mother and the Curé of Ars my father." "Alas! poor orphan!" said he with a sigh, "the father can never replace the mother."

On the return of his missionary after a prolonged absence, he took him in his arms with: "Ah! my friend, here you are! How glad I am! I have often thought that the lost must be intensely unhappy at their separation from God, since one can suffer so much, even here, from the absence of those one loves."

An ecclesiastic was apologising for not having brought a surplice with him in which to assist at the High Mass on Sunday. M. Vianney re-assured him thus: "Oh! don't be uneasy. The whiteness of the soul within will amply compensate for the lack of the surplice without."

A charming child presented him with a bouquet on his feast-day : " My child," said he, with a gracious smile, " your bouquet is beautiful indeed, but your soul is more beautiful still."

One day, during the octave of Corpus Christi, when the holy Curé had come to see the preparations for the magnificent processional altar which was usually erected in the grounds of the chateau, someone expressed regret that the high wind which had prevailed for several hours had upset the arrangements for the illumination prepared the evening before. Pointing to the young family who encircled the steps of the throne prepared for our Lord, the holy Curé said : " These are torches bright and shining that the wind cannot extinguish." On his departure, after having rejoiced all hearts by his presence, he added : " This house may change its occupants and generations succeed one another in it ; but it is ever the house of the good God."

On the return of the procession, which had been very long, they pressed him to take some refreshment. He declined, saying : " I have no need of anything. How should I be fatigued ? *I was bearing Him who bears me.*"

During the floods of May, 1856, it happened that one night the pilgrims who were waiting at the church had shut and bolted the outer door. At one o'clock the servant of God arrived and knocked gently ; no one answered ; he knocked again. The rain was pouring down in torrents. He was kept outside in it for some minutes and then went to his confessional without a thought of what might be the consequences of his misadventure. When he went to the sacristy to vest for Mass they noticed that the water was still running from his soutane. They entreated him to change ; they plied him with a thousand questions, to all of which he smilingly replied : " Let be ! let be ! it is nothing . . and it shows I am not made of sugar."

On one occasion M. Vianney was making his round of visits to the sick in the full glare of a July sun. The priest who accompanied him, seeing him bareheaded, ventured to offer the loan of his own hat. " You would do better, my friend," said M. Vianney, " to lend me your knowledge and your virtues."

This was the sort of thing one laid oneself open to, by attempting acts of politeness towards him ! But a very different reception awaited anyone who tried to say pretty things or pay compliments to him.

" How happy you ought to be in being young !" said he, to someone. " Not to mention other things, you have so much strength and zeal to devote to the service of the good God !"

" Monsieur le Curé," rejoined the other, " you are younger than I am."

" Yes, my friend—in virtue . . . "

" Monsieur le Curé," said another, one day, " since you are so

much attached to your missionaries, I take it that you will leave them the mantle of Elias when you go?"

"My friend, you must not reckon on inheriting a mantle from one who has not even a shirt."

Apropos of the *camail*, which was a touching inspiration on the part of his bishop, but a painful humiliation for the good Curé, someone once tried to flatter him by observing that he was, so far, the only canon created by Mgr. Chalandon. M. Vianney saw the trap and immediately replied: "I can well believe it. Monseigneur made a very unfortunate choice that first time. He sees his mistake and hasn't the courage to try again."

One day he perceived one of his portraits, at the foot of which had been inserted, with flagrant bad taste, his *camail* and cross of the Legion of Honour. "To make that complete," he remarked, "one has only to add: Vanity, Pride, Nothingness."

On another occasion allusion was made in his presence to his various dignities. "Yes," replied he, "I am honorary Canon by the too-great kindness of Monseigneur, Chevalier of the Legion of Honour by a mistake of the Government, and . . . keeper of an ass and three sheep by the will of my father."

M. Vianney knew how to give replies, when they were wanted, to which there was nothing to be said. A person who called himself a free-thinker went so far as to declare that there were things in the Christian religion which it was impossible to believe.

"For example?" said the good Curé.

"Well, eternal punishment, for instance."

"My friend, I should advise you never to talk about religion."

"And why should I not talk about it, pray?"

"Because you ought to learn your catechism first. What does the catechism say? That we must believe in the Gospel, because it is the Word of God. Do you believe the Gospel?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Curé."

"Well, then! the Gospel says: 'Depart into fire eternal!' What more would you have than that? It seems to me to be clear enough."

We were witness one day of an interview between the Curé of Ars and a rich Protestant. The servant of God, unaware that the man to whom he had just spoken as he knew how of our Lord and the saints had the misfortune to belong to a dissident sect, ended by presenting him with a medal. Said the latter on receiving it:

"Monsieur le Curé, you give a medal to a heretic! At least I am only a heretic from your point of view. But, in spite of the diversities of our belief, I hope that we shall one day meet in heaven."

M. Vianney took the hand of his interlocutor and, regarding him with a look in which was nothing but faith and charity, said in a tone of deepest sympathy:

"Alas! my friend, we shall not be united on high unless we have commenced to be united on earth; death will alter nothing. As the tree falls so must it lie."

"Monsieur le Curé, I put my trust in Christ, who has said: He that shall believe in me shall have eternal life."

"Ah! my friend, our Lord said other things besides that. He said that he that will not hear the Church ought to be regarded as a pagan. He also said that there should be one flock and one pastor." Then, assuming a gentler and more persuasive tone: "My friend, there are no two ways of serving our Lord, there is only one that is good: to serve Him as He would be served."

Whereupon the Curé of Ars disappeared, leaving his visitor a prey to a salutary uneasiness of mind, the forerunner of divine grace by which he was, as we have heard, happily conquered later.

The founder of a famous orphanage consulted M. Vianney as to the advisability of attracting the attention and support of the public by means of advertisement in the public press.

"Instead of raising your voice in the newspapers," replied the servant of God, "raise it before the door of the tabernacle."

"Monsieur le Curé, I should be very glad to make my novitiate with you."

"Be quite easy in your mind on that score," replied the Curé of Ars, briskly; "that is just what you are going to do"—this, with allusion to the trials which awaited the new-born foundation.

A postulant who had lately left the Sisters of Charity had an interview with a priest lately arrived from the East. This priest told M. Vianney that he had advised her to take her energy and zeal to Syria and work there. M. Vianney, who well knew the inconstancy of the young person in question, replied: "Send her to paradise; at least she will not come out of that."

It is plain that M. Vianney was nowise lacking in finesse, and that ingenious and piquant repartee came to him easily. On occasions a spice of kindly mischievousness manifested itself.

"Monsieur le Curé," said a personage whose ruddy face and rude health presented a singular contrast to the pallor and emaciation of the saintly old man, "I am relying on you to get a good reception above. I hope you do not forget old friends and that you will go halves with them in the merits of all your fasts and sacrifices. When you go to heaven I shall endeavour to hang on to your soutane."

"Oh! my friend, take care what you are about!" retorted the good Curé. "The entry to heaven is narrow and" (with a wicked little look at the broad shoulders of his interlocutor) "we should both be caught fast at the gate."

Afterwards, fearing that these words, which were said laughingly and with the best grace in the world, might have offended his visitor, he hastened to make a most humble apology for them.

A religious once said to him, genially : " It is generally believed, Father, that you are only an ignoramus." " And they make no mistake about that, my daughter," replied M. Vianney ; " but it matters not : I shall teach you more than you'll do."

— One of his parishioners, an excellent woman full of devotion and zeal, but whose zeal was sometimes too rough and impetuous—like that of the Apostles before Pentecost—would insist on giving him advice. " Monsieur le Curé, you were wrong to do this . . . Monsieur le Curé you would do better to do that . . . " " Go along with you," interrupted the holy man, sweetly ; " we are not in England yet "—thereby alluding to the British Constitution, which permits a woman to hold the reins of government.

Often there was a touch of humour about M. Vianney. A constant *habituée* of the pilgrimage had just replenished his stock of medals for him. He blessed them and then offered her some, saying : " Years ago, when I lived with my father, we had been cutting wood, and one of our neighbours had stolen a good deal of it. On my father entering his house a day or two after, this neighbour begged him to sit by the hearth. ' By all means,' replied my father, ' when one has furnished the fuel one may well get the benefit of the fire.' And so, my daughter, you may well accept the medals I offer you."

Returning from a drive in a carriage, Brother Athanasius, director of the school, told M. Vianney how the horse had shied and he had been thrown out into the ditch. The good Curé duly expressed his concern at the accident ; then he added : " My friend, you should imitate St. Anthony ; he never fell out of a carriage." " How did St. Anthony manage that, Monsieur le Curé ?" " He always went on foot."

And perhaps this will suffice to convince those who maintain that Christian asceticism dwarfs a man, lowers his character, enervates his intelligence, impoverishes his imagination and dries up his heart.

Despite his pronounced inclination for solitude, M. Vianney was remarkably approachable and companionable. In conversation he was at once open and reserved. In order to ward off remarks that might wound his humility and which experience had warned him to dread he never asked questions or gave openings for them. He kept the conversation in his own hands as far as he could and seemed to be afraid of the rôle of answerer. If he spoke of himself—which was but rarely—what he said was not prompted by self-love, of which he had not even the germ, but by his humility, from which indeed sprang his need for expansion. The opportunity of opening his heart to a few appeared to him a support conceded to his own weakness. Not being able to tell everybody what he really thought about himself, he relieved his mind by confiding it to these discreet souls ; and the matter of

such confidences was always the things that humiliated him most. But even then he never revealed himself completely ; he took you to the door of his soul and left you there.

Since his illness—after which he spent a fortnight in convalescence and such rest as he could get with his family at Dardilly—M. Vianney had never left his parish ; nor did his manner of life vary even for an hour. His sole recreation was visiting the sick and a brief appearance among his missionaries. “ My God ! what must heaven be like, when the company of saints on earth is so delightful and their conversation has so much charm and sweetness about it ? ” This exclamation has often escaped us as we left the presbytery after one of those little meetings in which by special favour the missionaries at Ars were successively admitted to the intimacy of the servant of God. For it was at the close of his laborious day that the Curé of Ars was at his best and manifested himself with the most familiarity, warmth and unconstraint. Standing in the chimney-corner or at his little table, according to season, the holy man unbent and we listened, sometimes interjecting a word or two, but more often in silence, while he talked out of the abundance of the innocence and joy of his heart.

We always noticed that, following the counsel of St. Paul, he avoided vain and worldly discourse, as well as those idle questions that lead to controversy and distract more than they edify. If any argument arose in his presence he always preserved a modest silence, as if by pronouncing in favour of one of the parties he feared to offend the other. When directly appealed to he would reply by some gracious or conciliatory word, or by stating some general principle that admitted of no discussion and which restored peace between the disputants. If some tactless individual—and there were such among the pilgrims—ventured to talk in his presence of merely temporal affairs and assign undue importance to them the Curé of Ars never interrupted—he was too courteous and tolerant for that—but he suffered visibly ; he became silent and ill at ease, and in the popular language, was evidently a fish out of water. But such occurrences were few and far between, for the spiritual atmosphere in which he lived did not lend itself to the introduction of worldly discussion.

Even in this century of movement, novelty and industrial progress, when most are wholly absorbed in commercialism or politics, the Curé of Ars never evinced any desire to learn more about the world and its doings, nor did the need of knowing more seem to occur to him. Events passed and went their way without causing him a moment’s distraction, so much had he come to use things as one who uses them not and rejoice as one that does not rejoice. Someone said once :

“ I notice, Monsieur le Curé, that you sometimes talk of the railway. Do you happen to know what it is ? ”

"No, and I have no desire to know. I speak of it because I hear it spoken of."

This man, to whom the railway brought some two or three hundred strangers every day, died without ever having seen one and even without forming any conception of what it might be.

But while he lived and died a stranger to the material world, everything that in any way pertained to the spiritual world and the conducting of souls thither, was a source of unceasing interest and delight to him. Nevertheless, sublime as were his own conceptions of the next life, the good Curé ever preserved that simplicity which is a characteristic of the children of God. Even in discoursing of heaven and heavenly things he spoke in everyday language and only availed himself of familiar comparisons. M. Vianney often talked about the saints, and usually with tears. To listen to his recitals, full of dramatic incident and personal detail, one would have been tempted to think he must have known and lived on intimate terms with them all. Much of what he told them was entirely new—at least to his hearers. The legendary side of the lives of the servants of God ever appealed most powerfully to his imagination and his heart; and he had the courage of his faith, never hesitating to dwell upon matters that go so far to humble the pride of human reason and scandalise the scoffer and the sceptic alike. "The sun," he would say, "never hides his light for fear of incommoding the owls."

He was entirely out of harmony with that school of hagiographers who make it their business to limit the power of Almighty God by the exclusion of the supernatural from the lives of the saints—as if sanctity itself was not the supernatural in action! Nothing was more manifest to him than the omnipresence of this adorable power throughout the visible universe; and it was precisely that which was most astonishing and ran most counter to the ordinary course of events that captivated him most. "I believe," said he, "that if we only had the faith we should control the will of God at our pleasure; it would be at our absolute disposal and He would refuse us nothing." Consequently he had never finished with the chapter of the divine complaisance in regard of the saints, and he had a thousand tales to tell, each one more beautiful and marvellous than the last.

Thus, he told of one who burned with the desire to adore our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament during the night and had only to wend his way to the nearest church the doors of which opened of their own accord to permit him to pass in.

Another, kneeling in church, before a veiled statue of the Blessed Virgin, was consumed with a longing to look upon the features of the Mother of God, whereupon the covering removed itself and he beheld our Lady herself all radiant and smiling upon him.

One day a saint met a little shepherd who was weeping bitterly because one of his sheep had just died. Touched with compassion, he recalled the poor beast to life.

—“See,” added the Curé of Ars, weeping, “see how good is God to those who love Him! He works miracles for the asking, when it is one of His friends who asks. The man with a pure heart commands the good God. St. Francis of Paula learned one day that his parents were about to be put to death because a murdered man had been found in their garden and they were accused of having committed the crime. He said: ‘Deign then, Lord, that I may be by their side to-morrow!’ That night an angel conveyed him four hundred leagues to the place where they were. Next morning he said, publicly: ‘Bring hither the body of the murdered man.’ It was brought. Then he said: ‘I command you in the name of God to say whether or no it was by the hands of my parents that you came by your death.’ Whereupon the man rose and cried: ‘No, it was not your parents who did it.’ Then the Saint entreated our Lord: ‘Have me taken back to my monastery.’ During the night the angel took him back again—thus completing eight hundred leagues. The good God has nothing to refuse to a pure heart.”

St. Vincent Ferrer wrought so many miracles that his superior, fearing a snare for his humility, forbade him to exercise the power he had received from God without permission. One day while he knelt in adoration before our Lord a workman who was engaged upon the repairs of the church fell from the top of a scaffold. The good Saint called to him: ‘Stop! stop! I have no power to resuscitate you.’ Then he went in all haste to ask permission of his superior. The latter opened his eyes wide, not understanding the matter at all and being persuaded that in any event the permission was too late. What was his astonishment when, having followed St. Vincent back to the scene of the accident, he found the unfortunate mason suspended in mid-air! ‘Very well,’ said he to the Saint, ‘do what you will. There is evidently no means of preventing it.’”

Perchance these narratives will meet the eye of the scornful. But for our own part we freely confess that they edified and charmed us, while they made us laugh and weep by turns. In an age in which simplicity is rapidly becoming extinct and tends more and more to disappear from the bonds which unite man and man it is the more delightful to find one who, despite his habitual elevation of mind, austere habits, and the painful sacrifices necessitated by an apostolate so laborious, still retained the heart of a little child.

Never did work or suffering diminish the animation of the Curé of Ars or cause him to become curt or abrupt in conversation. On the contrary, his gaiety and benevolence appeared rather to

increase in the midst of the infirmities of old age. The failings that not unfrequently accompany that sometimes rather depressing period of life seemed to be entirely suppressed in him, and to be replaced by a freshness of imagination and feeling which defied the ravages of time and was proof against the frosts of disillusionment—a harbinger of the perennial youth of the life of the blessed. M. Vianney never experienced the sadness which sometimes reduces declining years to silence, when all seems discoloured and the shadow of melancholy that enshrouds men and things overhangs even the soul itself. The conversations we had with him only two months before his death often recalled to our mind the words of a lady whose memory is justly held in veneration* : “The last thoughts of a heart filled with the love of God resemble the last rays of the setting sun—they are more intense and full of colour just before they disappear.”

*Madame Swetchine.

CHAPTER XLIV

HIS AMENITY OF CHARACTER, HIS POLITENESS, SIMPLICITY AND GOOD-HEARTEDNESS

He was suave, gentle and benevolent to all. (d'Achery, *Spicil.*)

IF the world errs when it asserts that piety cramps the imagination it errs still more gravely when it supposes that piety dries up the heart. The heart of M. Vianney, like that of the saints, was *liquid*. It was impossible to correspond more exactly than he did to the ideal of the Christian character set forth to us by the Apostle: "Put ye on therefore, as the elect of God, holy, and beloved, the bowels of mercy, benignity, humility, modesty, patience." (Col. iii., 12).

We have to confess that it is not given to all professing religion to exhibit that religion under the charming guise which is its natural element and which makes it attractive. That is a great misfortune, for one is less moved by the virtues of one whom one has no desire to resemble. When one is the representative and missionary of Almighty God in the world, the best means to gain souls for Him is to create and surround oneself with an atmosphere of the good and the beautiful. No doubt truth often crosses the path of one who has special need of it, but who flies from it—flies from it because it was presented in an unattractive form, and therefore frightened, and was repellent to him. But let the same truth be presented by the tactful and sympathetic hand of a trusted friend, and it will not only be listened to but received and embraced.

It has been rightly said that to acquire and change the indifferent and hostile into friends sanctity itself is not sufficient; that empire over souls requires something more; and that to be beloved and powerful in the world, humanity must be plainly recognisable beneath the robe of virtue. And the example of the Son of God is quoted, who, when He would establish the Christian religion as a law of love, became man Himself. There was, in the virtue of the Curé of Ars, this indescribable admixture of the human and divine. How should he not have been loved, he who loved so well and whose unique preoccupation was to do good without the least hope of return? Nor was it by alms and material liberality alone that he reigned over the hearts of his fellows. It was by his amenity, his benevolence, and his active and cordial interest in the welfare of all. The interior life appeared to develop in him a daily increasing solicitude for his neighbour. And in proportion as he redoubled his severity

towards himself so did he become more tender and indulgent towards others.

When St. John Chrysostom described a truly humble man by saying that he shows himself affable and gracious to all* he but painted the portrait of our holy Curé in advance. In practice one has no difficulty in being amiable when one has ceased to love oneself. Amiability of character and sweetness of manner blend with abnegation and self-sacrifice: they are the flowers of humility.

M. Vianney was possessed of thoughtfulness for others and delicacy of heart in an extraordinary degree. His was not the formal and frigid politeness of the world, but one which, having its origin in charity, cordiality and sincerity, set everyone at his ease. The servant of God thought of all, took care of all, only forgetting himself—and completely. He had no need of anything, not even of consolations or expressions of sympathy; he deemed himself unworthy of them.

The Curé of Ars never sat down in the presence of anybody else, nor would he allow them to stand in his own. When he entered and anyone rose at sight of him his confusion and embarrassment were very apparent: "Sit down! sit down!" he would say, accompanying his words with an expressive gesture, nor would he desist until one was seated again. When the highly-favoured individuals who had the good fortune to be received in his house in the evening rose to take their leave he would, exhausted and fatigued as he was, accompany them to the stair-head. It was impossible to induce him to remain in his room and bid his visitors good-night there. His formula on these occasions was invariably: "I offer you the expression of my most sincere respect." Had he known of any more humble or obsequious method, he would have used it. But this respect which he offered to everyone else he would not accept for himself. The word could not be addressed to him in any way without causing pain. He always stopped you short with: "Oh! I don't deserve your respect . . . A little friendliness is all I wish for!"

The Curé of Ars was not one of those who, taking their stand on a false interpretation of the Gospel and perhaps unconsciously misled by a secret pride, become contemptuous of all superiority and pose as levellers of every social distinction. He understood that Jesus Christ, in coming upon earth to restore all things, had sanctified both conditions—that of the lowly by His life of poverty and suffering and that of the great by His life of glory. In those of high estate he beheld the greatness and sovereignty of his Lord and Master, and it was this same Lord and Master that he desired to honour in the persons of the great ones of earth. But while rendering these the honour due to their position in life he was the

* *H. ille, graciosus et suavis omnibus est.* (Homil. 1., in Cor.)

more careful to cause them to honour Almighty God. His politeness was only equalled by his apostolic courage. Thus his tolerance for the opinions of others and his regard for their person never induced him to countenance either doctrines or practices beyond the limits of the Christian religion in its most severe and orthodox sense. And when necessary he had not the least hesitation in casting aside all human respect in order to say, firmly : " It cannot be allowed." It is easy to understand what an ascendancy such a noble and proud independence of spirit, reinforced as it was by the example of his poverty, mortification and disinterestedness, gave him over the hearts of all. And hence a single word from him would inaugurate sacrifices which, while hard to nature, were most efficacious to salvation.

Never was M. Vianney known to wound or repulse anyone by the smallest suspicion of coldness or indifference. A frank and gentle gaiety, an amiable unconstraint were the key-notes of his relations with others ; but they never degenerated into undue familiarity ; his humorous and witty sallies were always tempered by respect. We have known him sometimes excuse himself for the use of the expression *My dear*, which in the kindness of his heart he was accustomed to employ even in dealing with women of the world—an innocent mode of address which excited neither remark nor offence. Of his happy and timely rejoinders something was said in the previous chapter. We have ourselves heard him say with gracious politeness to a good woman who was enlarging to him concerning her numerous family : " Come, come, my dear, don't be frightened at your burden ; our Lord will help you to carry it. The good God does well what He does at all, and when He sends a young mother plenty of children it is because He thinks she will bring them up well ; it is in fact a mark of confidence on His part . . . One of these days your children will remember what they have seen you do much more than what they have heard you say."

The good Curé knew not how to refuse any request within the limits of what was reasonable and right. During his long career he never opened his mouth except to console, his heart except to receive and contain the sorrows of others, his hand except to scatter alms and benedictions.

A difficult test, and one under which the best sometimes fail, is to preserve one's calmness of mind in the whirl of activity, recollection amid the most absorbing external work, and self-possession and continual union with God in presence of the bustle and noise of a crowd. The Curé of Ars rose superior to this trial. Amid the clash of human passion he ever retained his own peace of mind without yielding to that elation or depression which so often import an element of instability into the daily life of even the strongest among us. At any moment he might be seen

surrounded by a clamorous multitude, harassed by idle or absurd questions, beset with impossible requests which seemed to come from every direction at once and yet always equable, ready, sympathetic and yielding ; always reposeful and smiling. No shadow of weariness, vexation or dejection was ever observed to pass over his countenance ; no word of complaint or reproach escaped his lips, not even one word higher than another. Were marks of respect showered upon him ; was he received with the noisy and unrestrained acclamations of the crowd, escorted and borne in triumph ; did he see them dogging his footsteps, hanging on his lips, kneeling about his path or bending to receive his blessing, he was ever the same—modest and simple as a child, without a suspicion that his own virtue was the cause of the astonishing spectacle of affection and veneration that the little village of Ars presented for upwards of thirty years.

This habitual equanimity on the part of the servant of God ceases to be a matter for astonishment when it is remembered that the life to which he had devoted himself, hard and exacting though it might be, was also the freest and calmest conceivable. One thing only shackles human liberty and troubles peace of mind—fear. In the last resort all fear resolves itself into the fear of suffering ; and therefore no fear can disquiet one who sees in suffering at once his happiness and his reward. Moods, troubles, storms, alternations of joy and sadness all give rise to desires more or less inordinate in the heart. One only suffers when one wants something one has not already. Did one only desire that the will of God might be accomplished, contentment would always reign. The holy priest had very early arrived at this spirit of universal detachment. In giving up what he had and also what he was he had recovered both in God, and was confirmed in that peace which is nothing less than perfect charity itself.

One thing always struck us—and in this those whose good fortune it has been to live in continual contact with him will concur—viz., that under whatever conditions he might be found, wherever he might be seen or heard, the *Saint* was always apparent. Most of us have our bad days, hours of weakness and times of trial—times in which even robust spirits quail and weaker vessels go to pieces. But with the venerable priest whose career we are considering it was not so. He could be observed at leisure at short range, the secret depths of his soul could be sounded, his life could be scrutinised in its most minute details, and he would lose nothing by the analysis. Never was he seen to act otherwise than in the most perfect manner, nor adopting any but the wisest and most heroic course of action. He ever selected the most excellent object and brought to its execution the purest intention and the greatest intensity of fervour, in such sort that we cannot imagine how any reproach could possibly be levelled at him of

having done things less well than they could have been done. His lightest actions spoke as forcefully as the gravest ; and thus the two-fold lesson of words and works survives him, revealing that marvellous harmony which rules in all that is truly good and before which prejudice is disarmed. Many have witnessed the active life of this holy priest of Jesus Christ and thought it so much beyond admiration as to be nothing less than a continued miracle in itself. Some have even known the details of his mortified and penitential existence and have been horrified at a *regime* so unusual in these our times. But very few have penetrated into his interior life, which is more wonderful still, and it is in the light of this that we must judge of him.

It sometimes seems to us that when we study the figure of contemporary saints attentively we discover traits of the physiognomy of our Redeemer in them which have not shone so resplendently in times past : to wit, a certain perfection of charity, a certain fragrance of sweetness and humility, which were not realised in such complete fulness in the early ages. We will not attempt to deny that all the primitive vegetation of virgin soil was there, together with a degree of vigour and heroism in virtue which is lacking in our own enfeebled characters and unspiritual minds. But as our Lord Himself advanced in wisdom and age and grace with God and man—that is with the humanity he came to redeem and re-invigorate—so Holy Church attains by daily development more nearly to the standard set up for her by Jesus Christ and will continue to do so “until we all meet into the unity of faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the age of the fulness of Christ.” (Eph. iv., 13).

It has been said that the power of the saints was due to their simplicity ; and this was eminently true in the case of the Curé of Ars. He diffused an atmosphere of simplicity around him that imparted a grace of its own to everything he did and caused persuasion to come from his lips with the force of eloquence, and even invested his moments of silence and inaction with an air of the supernatural. One could not be in his presence without feeling purer and better for it. The same must have been the experience of the Apostles with our Blessed Lord.

Not unfrequently is it assumed by the world that in order to impress others some sort of disguise is necessary—a disguise dignified with the name of art. Art has been the means adopted by man to accentuate his own importance in the eyes of his fellows. But the evident greatness of soul and loftiness of character owed nothing to the embellishments of art in the case of our holy Curé, they were the simple and natural manifestations of that which was within. To be sublime he had but to talk of things as they appeared to him and to be and act in all simple

sincerity. Instead of discoursing about virtue and implying that he possessed it his actions showed that he really did so and at what a cost. In dealing with him one was reminded of the words of Fénelon to the effect that simplicity renews the days of the primitive paradise once more. Hardly was one in his presence than human nature seemed to assume a new aspect—the one in which it appeared before man first went astray. Self-love, self-seeking and inherent suspicion trouble our relations with one another and render us hostile. In the Curé of Ars there was a complete absence of self-love, not a particle of ostentation, no attempt to act a part, nothing affected or constrained—only the simplicity of a child which, combined with his exquisite tact and absolute correctness of judgment, endowed his personality and conversation with a wondrous charm and called up the vision of that simple acceptance of the kingdom of God to which our Lord promised the reward of heaven.

More remarkable still in the servant of God was his kindness of heart. Beneath the surface of his manly and robust virtues a fund of exquisite delicacy and sensibility was apparent. When one kneels before the Cross of our Saviour and opens one's heart to Him every kindly feeling is at once purified and raised to a higher plane. They assume greater energy still from the permanent victory of mortification and humility over the senses and over pride. In fact there is a certain point beyond which the sources of human benevolence can only be divine. Benevolence in M. Vianney, like his exquisite manner and address, had its root in complete forgetfulness of self in things great or small; in other words, in his humility. Humble souls are the only ones that love properly, and they only it is who receive and reflect the rays of the divine benevolence.

It is quite impossible to describe the kindness of the Curé of Ars—he was kind in the highest and best acceptation of the word always and towards all. But he had an especial penchant for the poor, the sick, the ignorant and the erring, the four most wretched states of body and soul. He was lavish in his favours, consideration and attentions towards the least of the mendicants who approached him and endeavoured to indulge them as well as to help them. He ever showed himself anxious to spare those around him the slightest disappointment or the least contradiction. Words fail in which to depict the various phases this anxiety took in him—tenderness, indulgence, pity, gentleness, compliance, abnegation, liberality. His charity resembled nothing so much as the love of God, so pure, disinterested and inexhaustible was it! He had always the same qualities of heart then that he has now in heaven.

His kindness and consideration was revealed more than all in his relations with his missionaries. Every one of them had

some particular instance of it to relate, none of them but had at one time and another received some special mark of his regard. Just as he was unrelenting in his own work, indifferent to suffering, pitiless for himself, so he was sensitive, tender and quick to take alarm at anything which seemed to threaten the health of his colleagues. If he observed them suffer at all he made them rest, forbade them the pulpit and confessional, taking their work upon himself.

"On one of the first Sundays I was privileged to spend with him," said M. Toccanier, "the good *Saint* noticed that I coughed a good deal during Vespers. That evening after night prayers what was my surprise to see my venerable Curé at my door, lantern in hand, braving the weather to say: 'My friend, I see you have a nasty cough; I am not at all tired and will say the first Mass in your place and catechise the children.'"

M. Vianney did the same thing for the present writer one Lent. Remonstrances were ineffectual to prevent the good old man from taking my place three times in one week—and this after a heavy day's work! To render any resistance on my part impossible he left his own confessional abruptly and installed himself in the pulpit. "I have asked St. Philomena," said he, "to give me your cough." "Monsieur le Curé," replied I. "you must put your request in some other way. St. Philomena only accedes to prayers that are reasonable."

The servant of God abounded in little attentions to those who worked with him. Thus one day he observed that the superior of the missionaries had not brought his cloak with him—the cold weather had just set in; he had one made for him at once, of good warm cloth. On another occasion he saw me crossing the square in the rain. That night I found a brand-new umbrella in my room. He had sent expressly to Villefranche to buy it.

M. Vianney only received in order to give away: giving was his passion. Articles of piety that were given him, the only things to which he attached any value, only passed through his hands. He divested himself of them in favour of the first-comer to whom he thought they would be acceptable. One day he received a beautiful rosary, blessed in Jerusalem at the tomb of our Lord. The donor had said, in presenting it: "There, Father, take good care of that." A few minutes after the missionary who was to preach during the month of May arrived, and the good Curé gave him his rosary.

How many times have we heard him say, on looking at some reliquary, crucifix or picture: "That will do very well for me; I will keep it." But let anyone come in to whom he imagined the object in question might give pleasure, and he could not resist the temptation of depriving himself of it. He would have torn out his own eyes to give them away if anybody had asked for them.

The world understands and practises after its fashion this species of free-handedness, but in its most generous moments it is not altogether without a certain hope of reciprocity. The saint, on the contrary, finds his delight in giving without hope of return. Did our Lord imagine, think you, when He gave His life for men, that the world would henceforth live eternally on its knees at the foot of the Cross in adoration and gratitude? Not at all! this illusion never gained admittance to the Garden of Olives, nor was it cherished on Calvary. And at the same moment when the sins of the past were repaired, the ingratitude of the future was foreseen and condoned by the merciful eyes of Him who knows what is in the heart of man. And M. Vianney followed the example of His Master.

CHAPTER XLV

VIRTUES OF M. VIANNEY—HIS FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE OF OUR LORD. HIS DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN AND THE SAINTS

And now there remain faith, hope, charity, these three ; but the greater of these is charity. (I. Cor., xiii., 13.)

THE Curé of Ars had received the gift of faith in a very eminent degree. The Holy Ghost had endowed him with such spiritual insight that he appeared to see the divine things of which he spoke, and that with such clarity as to be carried altogether out of himself. What the ordinary individual only perceives as from afar and vaguely he seemed to see close to and in all its distinctness.

Faith was to the Curé of Ars the guiding principle of life ; it was all the science he possessed ; it explained everything to him and he explained everything by it. We once heard a young priest exclaim, on leaving the church after catechism "What faith he has ! Enough to enlighten a whole diocese."

"The faith of M. le Curé is so lively," says Catherine, in her *Mémoires*, "that he appears actually to see things. He is so penetrated with the Real Presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament that he speaks of it in nearly every instruction he gives. Then it is that his love gives him strength and causes him to forget his exhaustion. 'Did you but love our Lord,' said he to us one day, 'you would ever have before the eyes of your mind the tabernacle—that house of the good God. When you are on a journey and see a church-tower the sight should make your heart beat quicker, just as does the first view of the roof of his home move that of the father of the family. You ought never to be able to let it pass out of your thoughts.'"

M. Vianney often repeated : "How blest are our eyes in being able to contemplate the good God !" And he uttered these words with such an accent of profound conviction, while a ray of delight illuminated his whole countenance, that one could well believe he actually enjoyed the vision of God. From time to time his face would be observed to beam with an expression which nothing created could call forth. Once he remarked : "Our faith will only carry us some thousand miles or so, just as if we expected to find the good God on the other side of the ocean. If we possessed a real penetrating faith like the saints we should see our Lord like they did. There are priests who see Him every day in the Mass." Does not this recall the words of St. Paul : *Novi hominem ?**

* I know a man in Christ . . . caught up to the third heaven.

(II. Cor. xii., 2.)

"They who have no faith," said the Curé, "are blinder of heart than they who have no eyes at all . . . In this world we live as in a fog ; but faith is the wind that dissipates the mists and allows the sunlight to play upon our soul . . . Notice how among Protestants all is cold and sad. With us everything should be joyous and consoling . . . "

It was remarked that when M. Vianney preached from the altar he was so affected by the Real Presence of our Lord and the vicinity of the Holy Eucharist that he appeared to lose voice and be hardly able to breathe. His embarrassment was evident, and try as he might to diverge to another subject, he always recurred to his original theme.

"It was my good fortune to assist on two occasions when he administered the Last Sacraments," records M. Tailhades, in his notes, "and I can affirm that I never heard anyone else discourse on the other life with such conviction and such faith. One would have said that he actually saw with his bodily eyes the things about which he spoke. He inspired all present with the desire of dying in his arms. His words, all fire, caused the feelings of his own heart to pass thence into the soul of the poor patient, and they awaited the moment of their deliverance with calm confidence."

"Although it has seemed good to the eternal Father," says Bossuet, "not to see His faithful people in His own eternal sanctuary until they shall have completed their sojourn upon earth, nevertheless He would seem to have repented Him of having laid down such a long term of probation : He opens His paradise in advance by permitting some of His light and sweetness to pervade their souls while they still remain in the flesh, and these can say that their dwelling is in heaven and their society among the angels." The Curé of Ars could have said as much. Though still constrained by the limitations of the body, he was hardly less devoted to God than those pure spirits who ever shine before Him by the light of eternal charity. The fear of the judgments of God was his dominating idea ; nevertheless he wished for death and made it the object of all his prayers : "It is the union of the soul with the sovereign Good," as he said. He often spoke of writing a book on *The Delights of Death*. While others have need of all their courage to resign themselves to die he had need of all his to resign himself to live. There were moments when in his conversation one detected an echo of those longings which agitated St. Paul and inspired his desire to go forth from the tabernacle of this present life, in order that that which is mortal in him might be absorbed by the eternal. (II Cor. v.)

In the catechisms of the Curé of Ars the most graceful comparisons were those of this desire for heaven. He often made use of that of the swallow, which does but skim the surface of the earth

and hardly ever alights upon it ; of the flame which ever tends to rise ; of the balloon which ascends into the upper air when the cords that restrain it are severed. He said :

“ The heart goes forth to that which it loves best : the proud seek honours, the avaricious seek riches, the vindictive think of vengeance, the unclean of their wicked pleasures. But what does the good Christian think of ? Where do his affections centre ? On heaven, where is the God who is his treasure.

“ Man was created for heaven ; the devil broke the ladder that was to conduct him thither. Our Lord by His Passion has constructed another ; He has opened the door. The Blessed Virgin stands at the head of the ladder ; she holds it with both hands and calls to us : ‘ Come, come ! ’ O beautiful invitation ! What a magnificent destiny is that of man ! To see God, to love and bless Him, and contemplate Him throughout all eternity !

“ When one thinks of heaven can one bestow a thought on earth ? After having walked in heaven, St. Teresa was unable to look upon things below. When they showed her anything beautiful she said : ‘ It is nothing ; it is only dirt.’

“ St. Colette left her cell sometimes, unable to control herself for joy at the thought of heaven, and roamed the passages crying : ‘ To paradise ! to paradise ! ’

“ In heaven, our heart will be entirely lost, drowned in the happiness of the love of God, so that we shall give no heed to ourselves or others, but only to God.

“ A man blind from birth having been led to the tomb of St. Martin, instantly recovered his sight ; he was so overwhelmed with the beauties of nature that he fainted away with delight. We shall be like that blind man at the sight of heaven.

“ A good Christian should not be capable of feeling suffering in this life ; he does but pine away on earth. If a little child were in the church and its mother in the gallery it would stretch out its little arms to her and if it could not climb the stairs to reach her would cry for help, and not cease until it was back again in her arms.

“ It is said that in heaven we shall sit on thrones, to show how great we there shall be. Thrones, it is the love of God that makes them ; there is nothing besides that in heaven . . . The love of God will fill and pervade everything there . . .

“ When they asked St. Teresa what she had seen in heaven she cried : ‘ I have seen ! . . . I have seen ! . . . I have seen ! . . . ’ She said no more than that ; words failed and she could add nothing.

“ O beautiful union of the Church on earth with the Church in heaven ! As St. Teresa said : ‘ You in triumph, we in combat ; we are but one for the glory of God ! ’

“ St. Augustine said that anyone who dreads death does not

love God; and it is quite true. If you had been separated from your father for a long time, would you not be happy at the prospect of seeing him once more?

"Oh! what a splendid heritage is heaven! . . . But what must we do to obtain it? Be pure in heart, despise the world and love God."

One day, in speaking of heaven—where we shall see God as He is—he exclaimed, his eyes suffused with tears and with that tremor of love which we so often noticed: "Then we shall be able to say to the good God: My God! I see you! I will hold you fast! You shall no more escape me!—never! never!"

On another occasion, after an enthralling instruction on heaven, the Curé was asked: "What must one do then to obtain the reward of which you have just given such a magnificent picture; what is necessary?" "My friend," replied he, "grace and the Cross."

M. Vianney delighted to retail the story of a good religious who imagined that in paradise time would hang heavily on his hands. The good God convinced him that it was far otherwise . . . One day, being in the garden of the monastery, he noticed a little bird that hopped from branch to branch and became more beautiful the longer he regarded it. Eventually it became so beautiful, so beautiful, that the monk could not take his eyes off it. He resolved to capture it, and started in pursuit. Then he stopped, thinking that he must have occupied a good half-hour running after his bird. Accordingly he returned to the monastery, but he was surprised to find at the door a brother whom he had never seen, nor did the brother recognise him. His astonishment increased when on entering the house he encountered none but unknown faces and individuals he had never met before. He said: "Where are all the Fathers?" They looked at him without understanding. Eventually he mentioned his name, whereupon they searched the registers and it transpired that it was just a hundred years since he had started out. . . . Thus the good God showed him that time passes quickly in paradise.

Every power of which M. Vianney was possessed—mind, heart, body, were concentrated on one idea: the love of our God. That union of which St. John Chrysostom speaks was consummated in him: "Jesus Christ only in his thoughts, in his affections, in his desires. Without his Saviour even the society of the blessed would have been insufficient to satisfy him." Jesus Christ was his life, his heaven, his present, his future, and the adorable Eucharist the sole possible alleviation of the thirst that consumed him. He was powerless to divert his thoughts from Jesus Christ, to refrain from longing for Him, to cease to talk of Him. It was no longer words but flames of fire that issued from his heart and lips. There was even in his manner of pronouncing the adorable

name of Jesus and of uttering the words *our Lord* an intensity of expression that could not fail to strike his hearers. His whole heart appeared to come forth and concentrate on his lips.

What most impressed M. Vianney in his own spiritual reading and what he most frequently recurred to in his discourses was the burning words in which the love of the saints for the divine Master was most vehemently expressed.

He loved to quote the words of our Lord to St. Teresa : " I await the Day of Judgment, to make known to mankind how much thou hast loved me " ; and that other : " When men will have no more of me I shall seek me a hiding-place in thy heart. " He could never repeat this without melting into tears.

He would also recall the saying of St. Catherine of Siena, in which she exclaimed in the intensity of the ardour that possessed her : " O my dearest Lord ! if I had only been the rock and the soil on which Thy Cross was planted, what grace and consolation should I not have received from receiving the Blood that flowed from Thy wounds ! "

He used to relate with tenderness what St. Colette said to our Lord : " My sweet Master, I wish to love you, but my heart is too narrow. " Instantly she beheld a great heart enveloped in flames descend upon her and heard a voice which said : " Now love me as you wish to. " And her heart was inundated with love. " O Jesus ! " he often exclaimed, " to know Thee is to love Thee ! . . . If we only knew how much our Lord loves us we should die for joy ! I don't believe there can be hearts so hard as not to love when they see themselves so much beloved . . . What a marvellous thing is charity ! It is the overflowing of the Heart of Jesus, who is all love . . . The only consolation we have on earth is to love God and to know that He loves us . . . "

" Sometimes, " he sadly reflected, " I think that there will be very few good works to be rewarded, because instead of doing them for the love of God we perform them from custom, routine, from love of our own selves . . . What a pity that is ! "

" Everything under God's eye ; everything in union with God ; everything to please God . . . Oh ! how beautiful that is ! Come, my soul ! you are going to talk with the good God, to work with Him, to walk with Him, to fight and suffer with Him. You will work, but He will bless your labours ; you will walk, but He will bless your steps ; you will suffer, but He will bless your tears. How grand, how noble, how consoling to do all in company with and under the eye of the good God ; to think that He sees everything, that He takes account of everything ! Then say every morning : Everything to please Thee, O my God ! all my actions in union with Thee ! . . . How sweet and consoling is the thought of the holy presence of God ! . . . Never does one get fatigued ; the hours speed on like minutes . . . Thus it is a foretaste of heaven.

"Poor sinners! when I reflect that there are some who die without having enjoyed the happiness of loving God for a single hour! . . . When we tire of our practices of piety and converse with God bores us let us betake ourselves in spirit to the gate of hell and see the poor lost ones there who are no longer capable of loving the good God.

"If one could lose one's soul without inflicting suffering on our Lord, so be it! But one cannot.

"A good Christian who had the faith he ought to have would die of love . . . A good Christian who loves God and his neighbour—and when one loves God one also loves one's neighbour—see how happy he is! What peace dwells in his soul! It is heaven on earth.

"It often comes home to me that the tongue of those poor deceased who are in yonder cemetery can no longer pray, nor can their heart beat any more with love for God . . ."

M. Vianney often concluded his catechism with these words: "To be loved by God; to be united with God; to live in the presence of God; to live for God; O beautiful life! and beautiful death!"

One day as he listened to the birds singing in his courtyard he said, with a sigh: "Poor little birds! you were created to sing and you sing. Man was created to love God and he loves Him not!"

"How should one approach Almighty God?" we asked him one day. "My friend," he replied, briskly, "one should go straight to Him, like the ball from a cannon."

"What hinders us from loving God," said the Curé of Ars to the person who repeated it to us, "is that we have not reached the stage in which everything that costs us something gives pleasure."

"If one had to be lost," he added, "it would be some consolation to be able to say: 'At least I loved God while on earth . . .'" Some there are who weep because they imagine they do not love God; but they do in fact love Him. Oh! it does one good to think that, even on this poor earth, one still belongs to the good God, capable of more fidelity and love for Him!

"To be a king, melancholy position! One is a king for men! . . . But to belong to God, to be His entirely! to belong to God undividedly: body to God, soul to God! . . . A chaste body, a pure soul! Oh! there is nothing so beautiful!" (And here tears choked his utterance).

On another occasion, M. Vianney addressed us on the delights of prayer and the interior life—a subject he never approached without emotion. "In prayer," said he, "consists man's happiness on earth. O beautiful existence! beautiful union of the soul with our Lord! Eternity itself will not be long enough for us to fully understand its happiness . . . The interior life is a bath of

love into which the soul plunges . . . It is, as it were, drowned in love . . . God holds the interior man as a mother holds the head of her child in her hands to cover it with kisses and caresses. I often reflect upon the delight of the Apostles when they saw our Lord once more. The separation had been so cruel ! Our Lord loved them so ! He was so kind to them ! We can suppose that He embraced them, saying : ' Peace be unto you.' In like manner He embraces our soul when we pray. He says to us also : ' Peace be unto you.'

" One appreciates a thing in proportion to the price one has paid for it. By that you can estimate the love our Lord has for our soul which cost Him the last drop of His Blood ! He hungers to communicate and converse with it. He longs to see it, to hear it speak. . . .

" There are two channels by which to unite oneself with our Lord and make our salvation secure : prayer and the sacraments. Everyone who has become a saint has frequented the sacraments and raised the soul to God by prayer. On waking in the morning one ought to offer the heart, spirit, thoughts, words and actions—the whole being in fact—to God, to be used for nothing but His glory. Renew the promises made in baptism, thank the angel guardian and ask the continued protection of that good angel who remained beside us while we slept. During the entire day we should ask for the light of the Holy Spirit and often repeat : ' My God, have pity on me !' just as a child says to its mother : ' Please give me a piece of bread . . . give me your hand . . . embrace me !'

" The person who does not pray is like a fowl or a turkey that cannot rise into the air. If they manage to fly a little they speedily drop down again and, scratching up the soil, bury themselves in it and, covering up their head, seem to take pleasure in nothing else. On the other hand, the person who prays is as an eagle bold which, planing the air, appears to want to fly upwards to the sun. Oh ! what a wonderful thing is prayer ! He who is in God's grace has no need of being taught to pray ; prayer comes to him naturally because he knows his own necessities.

" Union with Jesus Christ, union with the Cross : in that lies salvation. The distinctive mark of the elect is love, just as the distinguishing sign of the reprobate is hatred. One reprobate does not love another reprobate ; brother detests brother, the son his father, the mother her child, and this universal hatred is concentrated on God ; that is what hell is. Saints love everybody and their enemies above all. The heart that lives in divine love dilates in proportion to the number of souls that the good God has placed round her path, like the wings of a hen which extend in proportion to the number of her chickens."

Again :

"The heart of a saint is constant, like a rock in the midst of the sea.

"Those who make a practice of devotion, who confess and receive Holy Communion frequently, but perform no works of faith and charity are like trees in blossom. You may think that there will be as much fruit as flowers ; but there is a vast difference between the two ! . . .

"Oh ! how wonderful will the morn of the Resurrection be ! Those beautiful souls will be seen coming down from heaven, like suns in their glory, to re-unite themselves with the bodies they animated on earth. The more mortified these bodies have been the more brilliantly they will shine then.

"None are so wretched as bad Christians who, abandoning prayer and sacraments, revel in sin ; but with faithful souls there is no unhappiness . . . To possess God is the joy of joys. This joy makes everything else forgotten. Like that good saint whose life I was reading a day or two ago : he was rapt in ecstasy from Shrove Tuesday till Easter-day—he came to himself in time for the Resurrection . . . This joy causes every suffering to pass into oblivion. Once upon a time the wind bore away the bearskin with which St. Simeon was covered. Someone seeing that he did not move on his pillar climbed up and found him frozen. They plunged him into hot water in order to revive him : ' Why did you not leave me,' said he, ' I was so happy ! '

"There is no need to speak much in order to make a good prayer. We know the good God is there, in His holy tabernacle ; we open our heart to Him ; we delight in His presence ; that is the best way to pray. It was thus with the good M. de Vidaud*. He was accustomed to rise very early in the morning and go to adore the Blessed Sacrament as soon as the church was opened. One day when he was staying at a château they were obliged to send three times to the chapel for him to come to breakfast, and his hostess was becoming impatient. At the third summons he left the presence of our Lord, saying : ' My God, they will not let me have a quiet moment with you ! ' He had been there since four o'clock," added the Curé of Ars, with tears . . . "There are good Christians who pass their whole life thus absorbed before the good God. Ah ! how blessed they are ! "

The Curé of Ars specially recommended three devotions : to the Passion of our Lord and the Blessed Sacrament, to the Blessed Virgin, and to the Holy Souls. He affirmed, with St. Bernard, that not to have a devotion to the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ was a sign of reprobation.

"The Passion of our Lord," said he, "is as a vast stream that pours down the mountain-side and is never exhausted . . . "

*The life of M. Gabriel de Vidaud has been written by Père Pouget, S. J.

It is impossible to convey even an idea of M. Vianney's devotion to the adorable Eucharist. He addressed it by all the sweetest and most tender names he could think of; he contrived to find new expressions in which to speak of it worthily; it was his favorite subject and one to which he returned unceasingly in his catechisms. Then his heart expanded with love and gratitude, his face became radiant, his eyes flashed fire, his speech was broken by tears, and the soul of the Saint was evident in his whole person.

"Oh, my children," he would exclaim, "what is it that our Lord does in the Sacrament of His love? He employs His noble Heart in loving us, and from that Heart issues a flood of tenderness and mercy to wash away the sins of the world."

The Holy Communion he called a *bath of love* :

"When one has received Holy Communion the soul revels in an aroma of love as the bee among flowers."

Very often he would express himself thus :

"After the consecration, when I hold the sacred Body of our Lord in my hands; and also in my hours of discouragement, when I reflect that I am only deserving of hell, I say to myself: 'Ah! if only I could take Him with me! hell would be sweet in His company; it would not cost me anything to remain and suffer there for all eternity, if only we were there together . . .' But then there would be no more hell in it: the flames of love would extinguish those of justice. How beautiful it is! After the consecration the good God is there, just as He is in heaven! Did man but really understand this mystery he would die of love . . . God spares us that because of our frailty.

"When God would provide nourishment to sustain our soul in the pilgrimage of life He scanned all creation and found nothing worthy of being used for such a purpose. Then He turned His thoughts inward and resolved to give Himself . . . O my soul! how grand art thou, since nothing but God can satisfy thee! The food of the soul is the Body and Blood of a God! Oh, marvellous reflection! In this fact alone, if one only reflected upon it, there is sufficient to cause one to lose oneself for all eternity in such an abyss of love! . . . How blessed are those pure souls who have the joy of union with our Lord by Communion! In heaven they will shine like costly diamonds, because God will be seen in them.* Our Lord said: 'Everything that you shall ask of my Father in my name, He will give you.' But never should we have thought of asking God to give us His own Son. But what man could never have imagined, God has done. What man could not have said or conceived and what man would never have dared to ask, God in His love has said, conceived and granted. Should we ever have ventured to ask God to send His Son on earth to die for us, to give us His Flesh to eat and His Blood to drink?

* . . . and his glory shall be seen upon thee. (Is. lx., 2.)

And if He has not done all this, then man has contrived to imagine something that God either cannot or will not do—that is that man has gone to greater lengths than God in his conception of love. But that is impossible.

“ Without the holy Eucharist there would be no happiness in this world, and life would be insupportable. When we receive Holy Communion we receive our joy and happiness.

“ The good God, wishing to give Himself to us in the Sacrament of His love, has implanted within us a desire so great and urgent that only He Himself can satisfy it . . . In the presence of this wonderful Sacrament we are like a person dying of thirst by the side of a river—he has only to bend his head to drink ; or a pauper who remains poor with great treasure within reach—he has but to stretch out his hand in order to seize it.

“ He that receives Holy Communion loses himself in God, like a drop of water in the ocean. Thenceforth they cannot be separated.

“ At the Day of Judgment the flesh of our Lord will be seen shining in the glorified body of those who have received it worthily on earth.

“ If anyone were to ask us after we have received Holy Communion : ‘ What is it you are taking home with you ? ’ we might answer : ‘ I am taking heaven with me.’

“ A saint used to say that such are as a priest that carries the Host to the sick. It is quite true ; but we have not enough faith. We do not realise our dignity. On leaving the Holy Table we are as highly-favoured as the Magi might have been had they been able to carry away the Infant Jesus.

“ Take a glass full of wine and drink it slowly and carefully ; you can enjoy its flavour almost as long as you please. In the same manner, if you keep your thoughts fixed on our Lord after Communion, you will feel for a long time that consuming fire which will inspire in your heart a desire of good and repugnance for evil.

“ When we receive the good God into our heart that heart ought to burn. The hearts of the disciples at Emmaus burned within them from the mere hearing of the words of their Master.

“ I don’t like to see those who leave the Holy Table commence to read their books immediately. Oh ! no ; to what purpose is the word of man when it is God who would speak ? . . . We should do what inquisitive people sometimes do—listen at the door. We should listen to all the good God says at the door of our heart.

“ When you have received our Lord you feel your soul purified, seeing that it has been bathed in the love of God.

“ When one goes to Holy Communion one feels something extraordinary—a sense of well-being that pervades the whole

body. What is this sense? It is our Lord Himself who communicates Himself to every part of us and causes it to respond. We have to exclaim with St. John: 'It is the Lord!' Those who feel nothing at all of this are much to be commiserated!"

The Curé of Ars loved to relate a story of St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa. While they were talking together of the joys of Holy Communion, the love of our Lord, passing from one to the other, inflamed their hearts to such a degree that St. John fell prostrate on one side of the grille and St. Teresa on the other . . .*

"When M. le Curé," says Catherine, "announced the procession of Corpus Christi and the Benediction-services of the octave, his heart seemed to be flooded with love and tenderness for the Blessed Sacrament. He said: 'Ah! if we only wished, we could obtain everything this week! Twice a day will the good God come to bless us . . . O my God, what a pity it is that we are not more thoroughly penetrated with Thy holy presence! . . . When you follow the route the procession has taken, you can truly say: 'The good God has passed this way.'

"'To-day,' he said, on a feast of the Sacred Heart, 'our Lord will receive us into His Sacred Heart. Would that we could always remain there!' Then, joining his hands and raising his eyes to heaven, he exclaimed: 'O Heart of Jesus, Heart of love! flower of love! . . . The Heart was all that remained intact in the Sacred Body of our Lord when Longinus† pierced it in order that its love might issue thence! . . . If we do not love the Heart of Jesus what should we love? There is nothing but love in that Heart! How comes it that we do not love what is so lovable!' " Thus Catherine.

One day, after presiding at the renovation of vows that the Sisters of St. Joseph were accustomed to make every 2nd of July, M. Vianney left the convent with a very full heart, and delivered himself as follows: "What a grand thing is religion! . . . The multitude of Thy consolations is infinite, O my God, to those that put their trust in Thee! . . . I was thinking just now that between our Lord and these good religious there is a constant emulation as to which shall give the most . . . But it is always our Lord who carries the day. The religious give their heart; He gives His Heart and His Body . . . When the Sisters said: 'I renew my vows of poverty, chastity and obedience,' I

*It is related in the Life of St. John of the Cross that, in 1572, when St. Teresa was appointed Prioress of the Convent of the Incarnation, at Avila, she summoned the holy man to be confessor to the community. Such were the delights of the spiritual communications between these two saintly souls that Mother Beatrice of Jesus found them ravished in ecstasy, one on each side of the parlour-grille. It is this episode to which the Curé of Ars alluded.

†A legend of the sixth century assigns this name to the soldier who pierced the sacred side of our Lord after the Crucifixion. Tr.

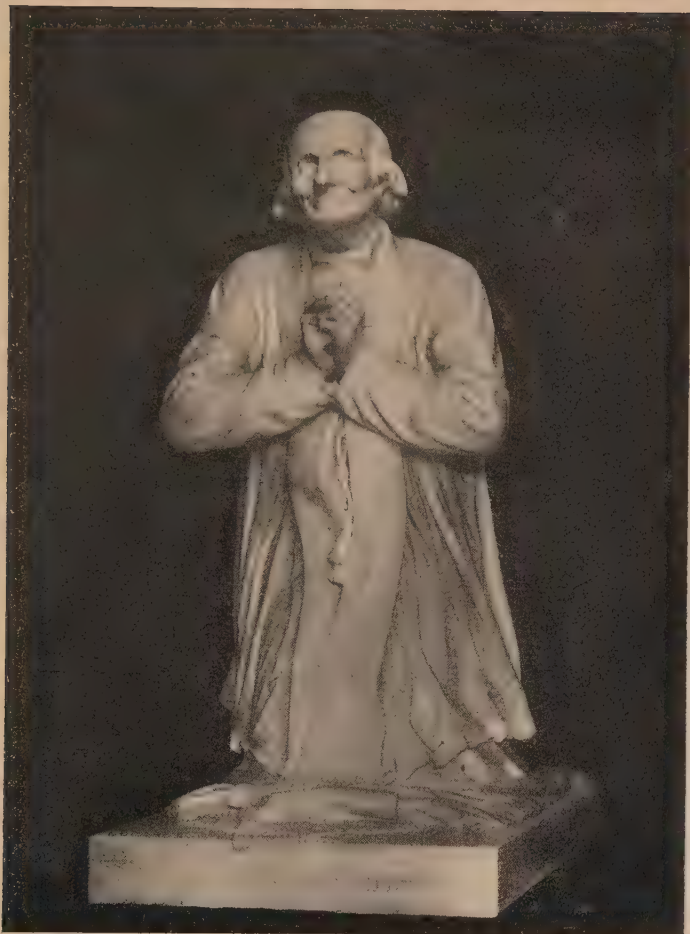
said, as I gave each one Holy Communion: 'May the Body of our Lord preserve thy soul to life everlasting.' " Then, taking the opportunity of enlarging on his favourite subject, he added: "If one could only understand all the benefits contained in Holy Communion one would never be content with a mere human heart. The miser would no longer seek money nor the worldling fame; both would shake off the dust of earth and fly towards the skies. Communion! . . . Oh! what honour God does to His creature! He rests on his tongue and alights on his heart as on a throne! O my God! my God!" (here he burst into tears), "there are some who have known how to appreciate the honour. Thus a holy bishop was seen to sweep the church with his own hands, and vest himself in his rochet for the work, so lowly to others, but so great in his eyes that he must needs be suitably adorned to fulfil it. In former days there was a king who squeezed the grapes for the wine for the chalice and prepared the flour for the host himself.

"A Communion well made suffices to inspire a soul with the love of God and cause it to neglect all earthly things. Not so long ago one of the *grande*es of this world came hither to make his Holy Communion. He had a fortune of three hundred thousand francs. A hundred thousand of them he gave to build a church, another hundred thousand he bestowed on the poor, the third hundred thousand he left to his relations, and he himself went to La Trappe. A learned lawyer came to Holy Communion after him and departed to place himself under the direction of *Père Lacordaire*. Oh! a Holy Communion—a single one—is enough to disgust a man with earth and give him a foretaste of celestial joys!"

"How greatly I regret your not being at Ars during the Forty Hours," wrote someone, in 1857, "when our good *Saint* spoke of the adorable Eucharist with lips that seemed to have been touched by the burning coals of the prophet. One can hardly bear such language; it is too divine for this world. In his catechisms—to adopt his own phraseology—his heart completely overflowed; and there issued from it a deluge of love that inundated us all."

Once more, Catherine:—

"The devotion of M. le Curé to the Blessed Sacrament is admirable. Before so many people came here he always recited his office kneeling on the floor of the choir, without any support at all; and often he would pause and look at the tabernacle with such a vivid expression of delight that one would have thought he saw our Lord. When the Blessed Sacrament is exposed he never sits down, except when there is a strange priest present and in order not to act differently from him. Then he sits sideways to the altar with his ecstatic smile. One of his colleagues noticing this, looked instinctively towards the tabernacle, as if expecting



Villand-Vernu, Phot., Ars (Ain)

Statue of the Curé of Ars before the Blessed Sacrament.

to see something there. He could see nothing, but he was so struck by M. Vianney's expression that he said: 'I believe that the time will come when the Curé of Ars will live on the Holy Eucharist alone.' "

All who had the privilege of assisting at the Mass of the Curé of Ars were convinced that he saw our Lord on the altar—that "he recognised Him in the breaking of bread." His whole appearance was in the highest degree suggestive of adoration and complete absorption of the material by the spiritual. It was impossible to detect even a passing distraction. Always in presence of a crowd whose gaze was rivetted on himself, he communicated with our Lord as easily and freely as though he had been in the solitude of his own chamber. Usually he shed abundance of tears throughout his celebration of the Holy Sacrifice.

M. Vianney was neither too fast nor too slow at the altar—being more concerned to consult the convenience of all than to follow the bent of his own devotion. "When I served his Mass," said a pilgrim, "the only time I noticed him to linger longer than other priests was just before the Communion. The liturgical prayers being ended, there ensued an interval of mysterious colloquy, which was perfectly noticeable to others, between Jesus Christ and His servant. M. Vianney regarded the sacred Host with devotion. His lips uttered the words, then there was an instant's hesitation, after which by a visible effort he consumed the sacred Species."

The Curé of Ars had received the gift of prayer in a super-eminent degree. His soul seemed to be more united to God than to his body. If he desired solitude it was only that his heart and faculties might be free to pursue that interior converse which is as the commencement of heaven on earth. Even in times of most exacting preoccupation he never relaxed his contemplation, living ever in the presence of God and regarding Him with tender affection in all His creatures. Nevertheless this continual contemplation never betrayed itself by any outward signs, save only by that pious and recollected bearing which is itself a witness to a great interior concentration; but even in this there was nothing savouring of affectation. Nor had he the air of one who appears to want to terrify Almighty God by a saddened or severe demeanour. What he gave Him he gave cheerfully and with a generous heart. He had a horror of all external exaggeration and discouraged it in others. "One day," said a priest to us, "when I made my confession to him he recommended me to refrain from assuming an attitude in church calculated to attract attention. He had, no doubt, remarked that I was somewhat singular in my deportment and that I bowed too profoundly before the altar. 'My friend,' added he, 'don't let us draw general attention upon ourselves.' "

M. Vianney had only one idea in life : to love God and to cause Him to be loved . . . God and nothing but God ! God always and God everywhere ! God in everything ! The entire life of the venerable Curé of Ars is expressed in that. Thirty years of that sublime monotony ! always employed about the work of God ! with never an instant's respite !

His love of God produced in the Curé of Ars another attachment—less known, less understood maybe ; but one that rises instinctively in every Catholic heart—love of Holy Church. This included all and everything which she, as represented by her visible Head, accepts and proposes. One could hardly mention Rome to him without drawing expressions of pleasure, mingled with regrets at departing this life without having seen the capital of the Christian world, the reliquary of the universe, the tomb of the Apostles and the Martyrs.

The piety of the Curé of Ars caused him to attach a high value to anything that bore even remotely on the service of God. The most insignificant object became dear and sacred to him at once, had it only some devout connexion. He loved pictures, crosses, scapulars, rosaries, medals, confraternities, sacramentals—above all, he loved relics. His church, the chapel at the *Providence*, and his own room were full of them. We heard him say one day, with an air of exceeding satisfaction, that he possessed five hundred.

He was insatiable for the Word of God, for himself and for the souls confided to his pastoral care. He made a point of always being present at a sermon when possible and listened with most scrupulous attention. He would on occasions and always with the utmost kindness express his opinion of the preacher with a keen appreciation of the merits of the discourse and a blind eye for defects. Thus he remarked of two of the missionaries, of whom one was the more solid, while the other was the more brilliant : “ These two good gentlemen both lead us to heaven in their own way ; the first by a bridge of stone, the second over a bridge of flowers.”

Next to the ministers and dispensers of the divine Word, religious were the objects of his predilection. He regarded them as the glory and ornaments of the Church, and delighted to converse with them of God and holy things. To that soul, for whom earth was but a place of exile, religious brought news of his true country and of his Father's house. For the rest, M. Vianney had a most profound veneration for all his colleagues, and from the moment they arrived at Ars evinced the utmost esteem of them. He accorded them the same privilege as the sick and infirm—that of attending to them immediately they asked his services.

As to special practices of devotion, the servant of God respected all those which are ordinarily used in the Church and freely advised

their being undertaken. He belonged to the Third Order of St. Francis and several confraternities.

He loved to recite the Divine Office in union with Jesus Christ and, to facilitate this unity, had associated the various Hours of the breviary with the various scenes in the Passion. At Matins he honoured the Agony in the Garden ; at Lauds the Sweat of Blood ; in Prime he commemorated the Condemnation ; at Tierce the Carrying of the Cross ; Sext he identified with the Crucifixion ; None with our Lord's Death ; Vespers with the Deposition from the Cross, concluding with the Burial at Compline. In particular did he appreciate the psalms. " When I think of those beautiful prayers," he would exclaim, " I am tempted to cry : *O felix culpa !* for if David had had no sins of his own to lament we should never have had those psalms."

To systematise his intentions during the week he proposed to himself to adore the Blessed Trinity on Sunday, and on Monday to invoke the Holy Spirit—on that day he also prayed for the souls in purgatory and offered all his merits for their intention. Tuesday he consecrated to the guardian angels, thanking the good God for having endowed these pure spirits with so ardent a desire for His glory, so great a promptitude in the execution of His commands, such constancy and fidelity in their trial and so much benevolence towards men. Wednesday was employed in the praise of the blessed in heaven. Thursday was the day of the Holy Eucharist ; Friday he devoted to the Passion of our Lord. On Saturday, M. Vianney gave thanks to God for the creation of Mary Immaculate and for having given her such a kind and compassionate heart for poor sinners.

This last was by no means the only way in which he manifested his devotion to the Blessed Virgin ; he loved to celebrate Mass at her altar whenever he could ; and he never failed to do so on Saturday. Every day he would recite the *Regina cæli* in thanksgiving for favours that had accrued to himself through Mary, at night prayers he recited the rosary of the Immaculate Conception from the pulpit. From the time he was a vicair he had organised an Association of Prayer in honour of the holy Mother of God. The fundamental practice consisted in reciting the *Ave Maria* when the clock struck the hour, with the invocation : *Blessed be the holy and Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God ! . . . O Mary, glorified of all nations, may the whole world invoke and bless thy Immaculate Heart !* This pious observance he never omitted. In order that he might be more faithful to it himself and lead his parishioners to be so too he placed a large clock in the tower, the sound of which could be heard at the farthest end of the village.

Before the Immaculate Conception was declared to be an article of faith, he had long believed in it. When the definition

was announced he exclaimed: "What a joy! I have often thought that a ray of light was missing from the Catholic Truths." And to mark his satisfaction and felicitate the Queen of heaven on her new glory he conceived the idea of offering her a magnificent ornament, a masterpiece designed by the architect Bossan gratuitously, and executed by the best embroiderers of Lyons, also gratuitously.

It was under the title of devout servant of Mary that M. Vianney first became known to his people. Even before the commencement of the pilgrimage the festivals of the Blessed Virgin had been celebrated at Ars with great pomp and an unaccustomed concourse of the faithful. This religious revival ever continued to increase. There were never so many strangers at Ars as on the days consecrated to the cult of the holy Mother of God. Her image was to be seen everywhere about the village, in the facade of the church, along the roads, at the door and inside the houses.

The Heart of the Blessed Virgin was at once the refuge of the Curé of Ars in all his troubles and the arsenal whence he borrowed the arms to fight against the powers of darkness. One of his principal practices was to advise a novena to the Heart of Mary. "I have so often drawn upon this source," said he, "that it were long since dried up, were it not inexhaustible." He never wearied of talking in his instructions of that Heart, so pure, so beautiful and so good—the handiwork and delight of the Blessed Trinity.

"The Father is pleased to regard it as the *chef-d'œuvre* of His hands: one always loves one's own work, especially when it is well done. The Son sees in it the Heart of His Mother, the source from which He drew the Blood with which He redeemed us. The Holy Ghost looks upon it as His temple.

"The Heart of this good Mother is all mercy and love; she only desires to see us happy. It is only necessary to turn to her in order to be heard . . .

"God loved us and to such a degree that He was ready to die for us; but, in the Heart of our Lord there is justice—which is an attribute of God—as well as love; in that of the Blessed Virgin there is only pity . . . her Son makes ready to punish a sinner, Mary intervenes, arrests the avenging sword and asks pardon for the unhappy offender: 'My Mother,' says our Lord to her, 'I can refuse nothing to you. If hell itself could repent you would obtain pardon for it.'

"The Blessed Virgin places herself between her Son and us. The greater sinners we are the greater her tenderness and compassion for us. The child that has cost its mother the most tears is dearest to her maternal heart. Does not she fly to the assistance of the feeblest of her offspring and the one that is in most danger? Does not the physician in the hospital reserve his more careful attention for the worst cases?

"The Heart of Mary is so tender for us that those of all other mothers together are but as a morsel of ice in comparison.

"See how kind the Blessed Virgin is! Her great servant, St. Bernard, was accustomed frequently to say to her: '*Hail Mary . . .*' One day this kindest of Mothers replied to him: '*Hail to you, my son Bernard.*'

"Devotion to our Lady softens the heart; it is sweet, stimulating.

"When one talks of things of earth, politics and so forth, one gets bored; but when the conversation turns on the Blessed Virgin it is always fresh.

"The *Ave Maria* is a prayer of which one never tires.

"One would not enter a house without a word to the doorkeeper: well then! the Blessed Virgin is the doorkeeper of heaven.

"When a man would offer a gift to some great personage he takes care to have the presentation made by the individual who is most acceptable to him, in order that the attention may be duly appreciated. So our prayers presented by the Blessed Virgin have a special merit of their own, because she is the only creature who has never offended God. Everything the Son asks of His Father is granted to Him. Everything the Mother asks of the Son is granted to her in like manner.

"When our hands have touched perfume they perfume everything with which they come in contact; if we pass our prayers through the hands of the Blessed Virgin they will assume a fragrance they lack at present.

"It seems to me that the Blessed Virgin will be very much relieved when the end of the world arrives; for while the world endures she is beset on every side . . . Our Lady is like a mother who has a multitude of children. She is continually occupied in going from one to the other.

"The Blessed Virgin has given birth to us twice, at the Incarnation and at the foot of the Cross; she is therefore our Mother in a two-fold sense.

"The Blessed Virgin is often compared to a mother, but she is better than the best of mothers, for they sometimes punish their child when it is naughty and even whip it—quite rightly, as they think. But the Blessed Virgin is not of the same way of thinking; she is so kind that she always treats us with love and never punishes on any account.

"The Son has His justice, but the Mother only her love.

"Before her coming the wrath of God was suspended over our heads, like a sword ready to smite us. Immediately the Blessed Virgin appeared on earth His wrath was appeased . . . She did not know she was to be the Mother of God, and when she was quite a child, used to say: 'When shall I see the wonderful creature who is to be the Mother of God?'

"Our Lady is the only person who has fulfilled the First Commandment as it ought to be fulfilled: 'Thou shalt adore but one God and love Him perfectly.' That is what she did."

M. Vianney thanked God the Father continually for having made the Blessed Virgin so great, so beautiful and so good! He blessed our Lord that He had caused her to be conceived without sin and He felicitated the Holy Spirit on the glory that redounded to Him from the unsullied purity of His Spouse.

In order to encourage devotion to the rosary he used often to relate that when St. Dominic was preaching in a church one day, one of his relations was present with all his household. This man appeared so hideous to the eyes of the Saint that he could not refrain from remarking it and out loud. Everyone took fright at him; wife, children, kindred, all drew away from his vicinity. St. Dominic then told him to recite the rosary. As he did so the demons who encircled him took to flight and his countenance recovered its ordinary expression. Another story M. Vianney told—one of his favorites—how a good saint who constantly recited: *Holy Mary, pray for me now and at the hour of my death*, one day heard the Blessed Virgin reply: "Do you wish to come to me in paradise?" "In paradise! in paradise! in paradise!" he exclaimed, and instantly expired. . . . "How beautiful to die thus!" added the Curé of Ars with tears.

The saints were for the Curé of Ars very real friends, in whose society he lived in heart and mind; he called them his *consuls*. For their pictures and relics he had a veritable passion. In his view there could be no better present than a relic. Wishing to give his missionaries a special token of good will, he sent to their chapel at Pont-d'Ain a valuable case of precious relics, among which were some of the holy Apostles. It was always his delight to talk of *those good saints* and—once started on this subject—he was in no hurry to relinquish it. Their characteristics, episodes of their lives, charming and little known fragments, were produced in all their minuteness from the stores of a memory that seemed inexhaustible. He was never tired in the telling nor were his friends in the hearing of them.

We have already spoken of the exceptional position accorded by the Curé of Ars to St. Philomena, in his veneration and devotion. From the very outset the *dear little Saint*, as he called her, responded freely to all his appeals; but as time progressed their union became increasingly intimate, and towards the end of his life their converse became much more immediate and direct. On the one side it was a perpetual invocation and on the other sensible assistance and a species of real presence.

Among those saints whose eulogy constantly came uppermost in his discourses it was easy to see that he accorded the highest place to those who, having undertaken the greatest labours and

endured the most suffering, thereby evinced the greatest love for our Lord. Next to St. Joseph, St. John the Baptist, St. John the Evangelist and the holy Apostles came St. Francis of Assisi, St. John Francis Regis, St. Louis, King of France, St. Aloysius Gonzaga, St. Stanislaus Kostka, St. Nicholas of Tolentino, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Colette and St. Teresa—saints whom he most often invoked. Above all, he had the most unbounded admiration for the seraphic St. Francis, on account of the spirit of love and sacrifice with which he was inflamed, and because he had provided in his own person a spouse “for that holy poverty who had remained a widow since the death of Jesus Christ.” He delighted, too, to speak of St. Clare, that other lover of the Cross and of holy poverty, “so modest that only once in her life was she seen to raise her eyes to ask the blessing of the Holy Father, and that was the only way it was known what colour her eyes were.”

The Curé of Ars had a great devotion to the souls in purgatory ; and he encouraged every enterprise undertaken for their relief. It is said of St. Dominic that he divided his blood into three parts ; and M. Vianney did the same with his heart, viz., works, sufferings and tears—the first for his own sins, the second for the sins of the living, and the third for the sins of the dead.

CHAPTER XLVI

CHARITY OF M VIANNEY. HIS ZEAL, LOVE OF THE POOR AND LIBERALITY

He that hath no zeal hath no love.

The multitude of the poor flocked towards him as bees fly to their hive.
(Bollandists, *Aredii vita proluxior.*)

Rich for the poor, poor for herself. (Rome. In Church of St. Sabina.)

For the Curé of Ars the second commandment of the Law (Matt. xxii., 39), *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*, was similar to the first ; it was still God whom he loved in the person of his brethren. Such a love of God as his would necessarily bring forth the prodigies of charity that we relate. When our Lord really takes up His abode in a human heart He inspires that heart with a pure and ardent zeal for the good of souls, extending even to those simple matters required by friendship, politeness and good manners. Benevolence towards the whole world without respect of persons was his habitual state ; not that benevolence that begins and ends in words, nor studied and practised benevolence of mere manner ; but one that proceeds from perfect charity and shows itself in acts of the purest devotedness. That faithful and generous soul never allowed itself to be discouraged by the defects and weaknesses of others ; he knew how to bear with, excuse, or explain them away, while hoping for amendment and trusting to the inexhaustible sources of the divine mercy to bring it about.

The incessant solicitude of M. Vianney for the spiritual and temporal wants of his neighbour was never permitted to affect his own spirit of recollection and purity of intention, nor to divert him from his preference for the *one thing necessary*. It was nothing but the effect of the divine charity which, in uniting man to God, sends him forth among his fellows ennobled and strengthened for action. The world understands nothing of this ; it only sees the outward result and what falls under the ken of the senses ; but the cause remains hidden. Nevertheless it might be expected that the world should endeavour to formulate some theory that would account for the devotion of a man who for forty years sacrificed his rest, health, tastes and freedom for the good of others and without appreciable reward.

Night, which is for others a time of repose, was for the venerable Curé of Ars the period of greatest struggle against weariness of spirit and exhaustion of body. He has often avowed that he never enjoyed more than a single hour of tranquil and refresh-

ing sleep. He had asked that he might suffer during the day for the conversion of sinners, during the night for the deliverance of the souls in purgatory ; and God had fully granted his request. Fever burned him up on his miserable pallet ; the cough that tore at his chest continued with no intermission ; every fifteen minutes or so he would get up, broken with fatigue and bathed in perspiration, to try to obtain some relief from his martyrdom outside bed. And when his pain commenced to die down from its very intensity, when he was just feeling able to get a little sleep, the hour had come when by a heroic effort that was renewed every night the poor old septuagenarian would abandon all hope of a night's rest and betake himself with a smiling face to commence another long and harassing day's work.

He was by this time so weak and sore that he could only get about by dragging himself from one chair to another or leaning against the walls of his room. What man in his condition but would have yielded to the temptation of staying in bed a little longer ? But such a temptation never even suggested itself to him. There at his door were souls in the bondage of sin who were sighing for the holy and glorious liberty of the children of God. And the love of these souls together with his thirst for their salvation caused all his sufferings to feel as nothing. He ever went, and without hesitation, as far as he could go. For the rest, once installed in his confessional, the good Master he was serving and who ever proportions His divine assistance to the needs of individuals, lent him all the strength necessary to continue his labours.

It is impossible to realise fully how near to the heart of the Curé of Ars was the salvation of souls ! He mourned continually over their loss. We have heard him say in an almost heart-broken tone : " How sad it is that these souls who have cost our Lord so much suffering should be lost for eternity ! "

A person told us once that she had been very much affected at the sight of M. Vianney weeping all alone over this ruin of souls. Lifting his eyes to heaven, he sighed as he said : " My God ! is it possible that you should have endured such torments to save souls, and that these souls should become the prey of the devil. "

One evening after he had left the church he spoke to us. I do not know whether it had reference to any particular case, but he spoke with profound sorrow and many tears about priests who do not correspond to the sanctity of their vocation. " A priest who celebrates without being in a state of grace ! what a monster he must be ! . . . No, one cannot understand such wickedness ! A man must be a heartless barbarian to come to that ! . . . " He told us he had a custom of long standing to recite every night before going to bed the *Gloria Patri* seven times, in reparation for outrages done to the Body of our Lord by unworthy

priests. He reminded us, too, that he had established a foundation of Masses for the same intention.

"It will never be known," says Catherine Lassagne, "to what extraordinary penances and to what a martyrdom M. le Curé condemns himself for poor sinners. He said to us one day: 'I don't know whether it was really a voice that I have heard or whether it was only a dream; but whatever it was it moved me exceedingly. This voice told me that to rescue a soul from sin is more acceptable to the good God than all possible sacrifices. I was just then full of resolutions about penance.' It occurred to us that perhaps he had decided to undertake some extraordinary austerity that would have undermined his constitution and that God sought to restrain him in this manner.

"I noticed several times that he was making novenas for the conversion of sinners, and knowing that he was overwhelmed with confessions I said to him one day: 'Monsieur le Curé, don't make such long prayers then; you see that you are trying to do more than you can!' 'That is so,' replied he, 'but I am so much impelled to pray for sinners that I cannot help myself.' " And so every week-day with the exception of Monday which he consecrated to the relief of the Holy Souls he offered the works and sufferings of the day for that intention. He returned thanks to God for having given His Son Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin so great a Heart to love poor sinners. In his various foundations of Masses he assigned a large share to them. He recommended as a matter especially agreeable to God prayer for these poor sinners, so that they might not by their hardness of heart render the Death and Passion of our most holy Redeemer in vain. He used to say:

"Nothing afflicts the Heart of Jesus Christ so much as to see all His sufferings useless for so many . . . Let us pray then for the conversion of sinners: that is the best and most useful of prayers. For the just are on the road to heaven, the souls in purgatory are sure to get there . . . But poor sinners! poor sinners! there are some of them whose fate is in suspense. A *Pater* and an *Ave* may suffice to turn the scale . . . how many souls can we not convert by our prayers! He who withdraws a soul from hell saves both that soul and his own besides. All devotions are good, but none is better than this one.

"Once upon a time St. Francis was praying in the woods: 'Lord,' said he, 'have compassion on poor sinners!' Our Lord appeared to him, and said: 'Francis, your will is conformed to mine. I am willing to accord you everything you ask.'

"St. Colette asked for the conversion of a thousand sinners. Then, on reflection, she was frightened at the number she had asked for and accused herself of temerity. And our Lady appeared to her and showed her the number of souls she had converted by her novenas . . .

"One can offer oneself as a victim for a week or a fortnight for the conversion of sinners. One can bear heat or cold; deprive oneself of the sight of something one wants to look at or a visit that would be pleasant; make a novena; assist at Mass on week-days for this intention—especially in towns, where there are plenty of opportunities of doing so. But there are some who would not walk a hundred steps to go to Mass. Those who have the happiness of frequent Communion can make a novena of Holy Communions. Not only does one give glory to God by this pious practice, but one draws down abundant graces on oneself."

"You have prayed," said M. Vianney, to a curé who had complained of his inability to influence the hearts of his parishioners, "you have prayed, you have wept, you have groaned, you have sighed. But have you fasted, have you watched, have you slept on the bare floor, have you taken the discipline? Until you have done all those things don't comfort yourself with the idea that you have done everything."

"Monsieur le Curé," said his missionary one day, "if the good God were to give you the choice of going to heaven at once or of remaining on earth to labour for the conversion of sinners, which would you do?"

"I think I should stay here."

"Oh! Monsieur le Curé, is it possible you would do that? The saints in heaven are so happy! No more temptation, no more trouble!"

"It is true, my friend," replied he, with an angelic smile, "but the saints are living on their property! They must have worked well, for God only rewards labour, while He punishes idleness; but they can no longer, like ourselves, glorify Him by sacrifice for the good of souls."

"Would you stay on earth down to the end of time?"

"Just so."

"In that case you would have plenty of time before you; you get up at such an hour in the morning!"

"Yes, at midnight! I don't mind the trouble. I should be the happiest of men were it not for the thought of having to appear before the tribunal of God with my *poor Curé's life* behind me." And so saying great tears ran down his cheeks.

Next to sinners the poor were M. Vianney's chief concern. He loved them because our Lord loved them and because he understood that finding nothing here below but privation, suffering and slights of all sorts, they had greater need of help, esteem and consolation. Thanks to the indigent, afflicted, infirm and unhappy ones of every condition and variety who flocked to him without ceasing, the Curé of Ars had more benefits to dispense than a king. Nor was his charity exercised only towards those who presented themselves and their troubles; he went in search of

those who, timid and sensitive, in hiding their necessities under a deceptive appearance of prosperity, suffered much more than the others. He well knew how poignant is that suffering that no one notices, how bitter the tears which there is none to wipe away. He endeavoured to penetrate with all the delicacy that the conditions demanded the secrets of that poverty which is genuinely reluctant to make its needs known.

It was the general belief throughout the whole countryside that the holy Curé supported a large number of families that had seen better days and who came to him from Lyons and the neighbourhood. We knew of one poor mother who came from a village near-by every week to ask him for food for her children.

In 1854 someone remarked to M. Vianney, apropos of the death of one of his parishioners: "Monsieur le Curé, her decease will mean a little income for you." "Oh!" replied he, "that little income is already mortgaged to sundry individuals!"

About the same time he sent to one of his own debtors to ask for a small sum on account. The man, thinking the Curé of Ars had no need of money, refused. "He thinks I have no need of money," was the sole comment of the good Curé, "and St. Martin's day at hand, when I shall have to find their rent for more than thirty families!"

When the world does come to the assistance of the poor it seems unable to do so without adding humiliation to misfortune by a somewhat supercilious pity. It seems to forget that while alms blesseth him that receiveth it also blesseth him that giveth; and consequently forbids anything in the nature of a reproach to the recipient. The truly charitable recognise that the poor man in receiving bread from his hand just as he receives light from God actually honours his benefactor; and that poverty is not merely an interesting phase, but also a holy and honourable state. "It is a very good thing," M. Vianney used to say, "that the poor should come to seek us in this fashion! Otherwise we should have to seek them; and one has not always the time for that."

Whenever a poor man knocked at his door instead of throwing him a piece of bread from the window he would go down to see and speak to him and add a few kind and encouraging words to his material alms.

He would often say: "There are some people who only bestow alms in order to be seen, that people may praise and admire them . . . There are others who think they do not receive sufficient gratitude for what they do. It is not so! . . . If it is for worldly motives that you give alms you have some right to complain; but if you do it for the sake of the good God, what does it matter whether you are thanked or no? We should do all the good we can to everyone and expect our reward from God alone."

"When we give alms we ought to think that we do so to our

Lord and not to the poor themselves. Very often we imagine that it is a poor person we are relieving, and it happens to be really Jesus Christ . . . For example, there was St. John of God, who was accustomed to wash the feet of the poor before inviting them to eat. One day when he bent over the feet of a poor man he saw that his feet were pierced. Raising his head, he exclaimed with emotion: 'It is you then, Lord!' (Here M. Vianney burst into tears) "And our Lord replied: 'John, I am pleased to see the care you take of my poor.' And He disappeared.

"There was good St. Gregory, who had twelve poor men to eat at his table every day. One day he found thirteen of them, and remarked to his servant: 'There are thirteen people here today.' The latter answered: 'I can only see twelve.' The Saint noticed that this thirteenth man changed his colour; now he seemed to be of a rosy complexion, then he appeared white as snow. The repast ended, the Pope took the unknown by the hand, drew him into a corner and asked: 'Who may you be?' 'I am an angel' (fresh tears from the holy Curé), "and our Lord has sent me to note at close quarters the attentions you pay to His poor. It is I who will offer your prayers and alms to God.' Wherewith he vanished. The table at which this angel sat is still to be seen in Rome.

"There are some who tell the poor: 'You are idle! you are quite able to work,' You do not know whether it is not God's good pleasure that this or that person should beg his bread. Thus you expose yourself to the risk of finding fault with the will of God! Think of the Blessed Benedict Joseph Labre, whom all the world rebuffed. Some called him a lazy fellow; the very children threw stones at him. But the good saint knew he was doing the will of God, and answered never a word. One day his confessor said to him: 'My friend, I think you would do better to go to work; you are giving scandal. They say it is nothing but sloth that induces you to beg.' Benedict replied, very humbly: 'Father, it is God's will that I should beg. Draw back the curtain of your confessional and you will see.' The priest did so and beheld a light that illuminated the whole chapel. Thereafter the confessor took good care not to endeavour to turn Benedict from his way of life . . . Well then! my children, how can you tell whether there may not be others like him? That is one reason for never repelling the poor. If you cannot give yourself you can pray that God will inspire someone else to do so.

"There are some who say: 'Oh! this man makes a bad use of the alms he receives.' Whatever use he makes of it the man will be judged by that use; and you—you will be judged by the alms that you could have given and didn't give.

"We should never despise the poor, because our contempt redounds on God Himself."

The Curé of Ars was by no means content with merely preaching love for the poor. Following the example of Him who always did good before He urged others to do it, he was careful that his own deeds should not only conform to his instructions but be beforehand with them.

Catherine relates that in order to satisfy his craving for giving he never hesitated to sell his poor bits of furniture piecemeal to those who would pay generously for them. At length it came to such a pass that he would dispose of old shoes, old soutanes, old surplices—every stick and stitch that he was possessed of in fact—at extravagant prices, forcing his humility to yield to that premier virtue, charity. These little traits of benevolence, perhaps a trifle singular in themselves, furnished material for a good deal of merriment among his colleagues. If they seemed inclined to wear the subject threadbare he would cut the conversation short with: "After all, what does it matter so I have money for my poor?" It is quite certain that if he had had charge of his own wardrobe his charity would have left him without a change of linen. "His sheets and towels vanished long ago," continues Catherine, "now we put out just the linen that is necessary for the moment and this, after he has used it, is distributed as relics and replaced by fresh. Whenever he receives a present of new clothes he insists on retaining the old ones, especially if the former are of higher price and better material. In this last event he sells them in order to purchase articles more conformable to holy poverty."

One day a poor man stopped M. Vianney just as he was leaving the *Providence*. The poor fellow had nothing on his feet, which were all cut and bleeding. The good Curé took off his own shoes and stockings, gave them to the man and regained the presbytery as best he could, taking care to stoop so as to hide his bare feet and legs under the skirts of his soutane.

Another day a mendicant approached him. M. Vianney searched his pockets and finding nothing but his handkerchief, gave that, apologising for not being able to do more just then. This incident recalls that of St. Elizabeth taking off one of her gloves to bestow it on a poor man.

Later on, in order not to be found unprepared, the servant of God invariably carried money about him to be dispensed in alms. It had to be replenished frequently as the Curé gave with both hands and liberally. Several times was he descried searching the crowd or the various quarters of the village for those on whose account he reproached himself for not having given a sufficiently abundant alms.

A thief having broken into the presbytery, found a few pewter spoons and forks at the bottom of a drawer. These he appropriated and passing on to the room where the provisions destined

for the *Providence* were kept was laying hands on the orphans' bread, when he was surprised by M. Vianney. "What may you be doing there, my friend?" "I am hungry, Monsieur le Curé." Having given him a substantial alms, the good Saint, who perfectly recognised his *plate*, as he called it, in the possession of his visitor, added: "Escape, my friend, escape as fast as you can, lest someone should arrest you!" Once he went to a woman who had robbed him of nine hundred francs to warn her that the gendarmes were looking for her. He paid a pension to another one so that she might not steal again.

Alms has been dowered with the singular property by Almighty God that its bestowal augments its source instead of diminishing it; what falls from the right hand returns to the left. Thus the ocean receives all the water of the earth, because it returns it all to heaven. The heart and hands of the Curé of Ars were like the ocean. This poor priest, so poor that he possessed nothing except *his poor sins*, as he said, enriched everyone around him by his benefactions. Gold and silver flowed to him from France, Belgium, England and Germany by a thousand invisible channels. He had but to wish in order to obtain instantly the means necessary for the furtherance of some good work or the establishment of a foundation. He frequently received considerable sums of money, the sources of which have ever remained an impenetrable secret.

Sometimes, but rarely, it appeared as if the stream was drying up; then M. Vianney would betake himself to prayer: *Je casse la tête à mes bons saints*, as he expressed it, and the mysterious stream commenced to flow again. He found money for which he could not account in his pockets, on his table, in his drawers and even among the ashes in his grate.

"It was only necessary for him to express a wish" pursues Catherine; "he had saints in heaven whom he called his *consuls*; these he invoked and tormented and supplies arrived forthwith. When he received the inspiration to establish a foundation in his church in honour of the Heart of Mary he made this prayer to the Blessed Virgin: 'O my Mother! if this work be pleasing to you, obtain for me the funds to accomplish it.' That very day after catechism he said to us: 'I have found two hundred francs in my desk . . . How kind is the good God!' 'Well then!' said Jeanne-Marie Chaney, 'since this money is miraculous, it might be as well to keep some of it. Who can tell but that it might attract more?' 'Yes,' replied M. le Curé, 'this money is celestial.' And in fact Jeanne-Marie took four five-franc-pieces of it in exchange for others; afterwards she repented that she had not taken all of them."

We find once more in Catherine's notes, under date of 19th October, 1839: "M. le Curé told us: 'A singular thing happened

to me to-day. I had a quiet laugh at it all to myself. Noticing that my purse was getting larger and larger, I examined it and found a handful of crowns and one double-louis.' 'Perhaps someone gave them you, Monsieur le Curé.' 'I don't know, but I think not. My cupboard is kept locked, and the key was in the drawer of my table. Besides, it is not the first time such a thing has happened. A cask of wine which I had never ordered appeared in my cellar. The poorer one becomes for the love of God the richer one is in reality.' "

"On a certain occasion," relates M. Tailhades, "the Curé of Ars had asked the children at the *Providence* to make a novena in honour of our Lady, St. Joseph and St. John the Baptist, for an important object. During the novena I met him, and he said : 'I am very anxious ; I owe more than three thousand francs . . . Ah ! one should be very careful not to run into debt !' 'Don't distress yourself, Monsieur le Curé,' replied I, 'the good God will settle it all for you.'

"Next day, at the close of the catechism, we exchanged a few words, which he broke off by saying : 'I must leave you now ; I am going to count my money.' I thought it more discreet not to ask any questions or follow him. A few minutes later he came to see me—radiant.

"Look ! we have found money, plenty of money ! . . . I am rolling in money just now ; and it is so heavy that I can hardly walk. My pockets bulged so much that I had to hold them up with both hands. I was afraid I might be seen in that state.'

"You see then, Monsieur le Curé, that the good God evidently wishes you to remain here, since He comes to your aid by miracle.'

"Oh ! what the good God does here He could just as easily do elsewhere. Whether St. Vincent de Paul turned to the right or the left for his foundations, divine Providence followed him there.'

"But, seriously, Monsieur le Curé, where did you find all this money ?'

"I found it somewhere . . . By the way, a lady did give me a handful of crowns this morning.'

"Monsieur le Curé, teach me how to work miracles like that.'

"M. Vianney assumed a grave air and instead of answering directly said : 'My friend, there is nothing that disconcerts the devil more and draws down the graces of God more than fasts and vigils. When I was alone and could do as I liked I obtained everything I wanted.' Here the holy Curé was interrupted by his tears. 'Now I can't stay so long without food, become unable to speak and have no more strength.'

"To-day, 2nd November," continues the Abbé Tailhades, "M. Vianney said to me with an air of satisfaction : 'I have found some more money. Yesterday I said to our Lady : "Holy

Mother, if devotion to your Immaculate Conception is pleasing to you, procure me the money to make the foundation I propose to establish in honour of your Heart." And this morning I repeated my request, but I added : " You must find me two hundred francs by this evening. If it comes later, it will not be for you." And just now, a person offered me three hundred francs. I replied : " No, that is too much ; but I will gladly accept two hundred."

" Two days later he said to me : ' It is in my mind to establish another foundation in honour of the Five Wounds of our Lord, for the conversion of sinners in this diocese. I must consider it before the good God, and if He gives me any sign that this foundation is agreeable to Him I shall proceed with the matter. There will be no trouble about funds ; the good God is rich and knows how to get them for me. I wonder what the Bishop will think of all these foundations. Some of them will be for priests, some for the faithful and some for everybody . . . Oh ! I hope he will allow me to retire then ; and I shall still work from the depths of my retreat and be of some use by means of these foundations. Ah ! how I will pray to the good God when I am once more alone ! And I think I shall find a great deal of happiness.'

" Concerning this new foundation he proposed to make in honour of the Five Wounds I said to him : ' But, how will you recognise the will of God in this affair ? ' He answered : ' It comes like a ray of light . . . I make a novena through the children at the *Providence*, and I lay the object of this novena before our Lord at the altar. Ordinarily before the eighth day I know what I ought to do.' ' You actually ask the good God for a sign ? ' ' Yes, such is my practice : " If you desire this of me. O my God, let me know it by such a sign." I do the same as Gideon,' continued he, smiling ; ' I impose the condition and if it is fulfilled I recognise the will of God and make haste to execute it.' "

It was the great world beyond, to which M. Vianney never went but which always came in search of him, that he made his treasurer and the patron of his works. He was glad to furnish the rich with an opportunity of still further enriching themselves by giving to our Lord. Thus he contrived to strew the face of the country far and near with his benefactions. A complete list of his foundations would be endless ; and how many good works were there of which nothing was known !

One day at the after-dinner visit that M. Toccanier and I paid to the holy Curé we found him more blithesome than usual—a fact that had already struck us at the catechism. It was, I think, the only day I did not see him weep, and indeed the subject hardly lent itself to it.

" Monsieur le Curé," I began, " you seem radiant to-day ! "

"I certainly am, my friend ; and with good reason. I discovered this morning that I have riches to the amount of two hundred thousand francs ! And what is better still : this capital is invested at high interest in the safest bank in the universe. I am lending it to three persons who are as well-to-do as it is possible to conceive."

We could not solve the conundrum out of hand ; so we asked an explanation of Brother Jérôme, who for all reply produced the register of the foundations made. They amounted to a total sum of two hundred thousand francs, for the sole purpose of decennial missions throughout the diocese.

In the course of the year 1848 the Curé of Ars conceived the idea of providing his parish with a free-school for boys. He appealed to his people, who responded spontaneously. By surrendering a small income of his own, he achieved a capital of some twenty thousand francs—the sum necessary to establish the work, which he confided to the Brothers of the Holy Family, of Belley. God blessed the undertaking, which has never ceased to increase and prosper. The little school has become a flourishing boarding-school, and under the direction of the good brothers, so much loved and venerated at Ars, continues to render the most devoted services to the youth of the neighbourhood, as well as to the pilgrimage. M. Vianney did not rest content with having introduced the religious of the Holy Family into Ars ; he endeavoured to confer further benefits on their congregation. Every year he sent carefully-selected subjects to their mother-house ; he enriched their chapel with sacred vessels of great value, and made an annual foundation there of twenty-five Masses for the conversion of sinners.

The Curé of Ars founded besides more than a thousand annual Masses, representing a capital sum of forty thousand francs. It will be interesting to note the intentions of some of them—they will show better than anything else the spirit of this good *Saint* ! Here are a few :

In honour of the Sacred Humanity of our Lord, to make reparation for the outrages He receives in the Holy Sacrament of His love ; in honour of the Five Wounds, for the conversion of sinners ; in honour of His Agony in the Garden, to obtain the conversion of the dying.

In honour of the Holy Spirit, to ask for the establishment of the Catholic Faith among heathen nations.

In honour of the Heart of Mary, to entreat her protection for missionaries engaged in carrying the blessings of the Faith to idolatrous peoples ; in honour of the same Heart of Mary, to obtain her protection over the priests of the diocese of Belley.

In honour of the Twelve Privileges of the Blessed Virgin, to ask her patronage for the dying ; and in honour of the Seven Dolours for the same intention.

To thank Almighty God for having preserved our Blessed Lady from original sin ; to praise the Holy Spirit for the honour done to her by the promulgation of the Dogma ; and to claim the protection of Mary Immaculate for children before their birth, to the end that they may safely arrive at the grace of holy baptism.

The other Masses were founded for intentions more particularised. There were some in honour of St. Philomena, for parishes designated by name ; for M. Vianney's benefactors, and so on. The faithful departed were in no wise forgotten ; an important share of the foundations fell to them.

No money that found its way into the pockets of M. Vianney ever made any stay there ; he made it a rule to empty them twice a day. And his left hand never knew what his right hand did : only God knows the amount of it.

Such was his passion for despoiling himself of everything that in order to safeguard the money for his Masses he had to take precautions against himself. For a long time he had been in the habit of depositing this money in the hands of a certain good widow of his confidence, with the warning : " Claudine, I entrust this money to your keeping ; see that you take good care of it ! But be especially on your guard against the Curé of Ars ; and if he asks for any of it refuse him point-blank."

A priest engaged in building a church, and consequently always short of cash, once said to him : " Monsieur le Curé, let me into your secret ; it would be most useful to me to hasten the construction of my poor church." " My friend," replied the servant of God, " my secret is very simple : *give everything and keep nothing.*"

This was almost literally the counsel of Sœur Rosalie, who urged that it was always necessary to give with one hand continually, if one would receive plenteously with the other.

The servant of God ever viewed matters in the light of faith, and his liberality was a source of profound satisfaction to himself from the thought of the annoyance it caused the devil. " The *grappin*," said he, " is furious when he sees this money which he uses to corrupt and ruin souls turned to their salvation in our hands."

CHAPTER XLVII

HUMILITY OF M. VIANNEY. HIS POVERTY

What is specially admirable is that, in the midst of so many and great works accomplished and so much suffering borne, he yet maintained perfect humility. (St. John Chrys., *Hom. in II. ad Cor.*)

A dame, to whom none openeth pleasure's gate more than to death . . . and he did make her his . . . from day to day, then loved her more devoutly. She, bereaved of her first husband, slighted and obscure, thousand and hundred years and more, remain'd without a single suitor, till he came. (Dante. *Paradise c. xi.*)

It remains to speak of the three virtues which have shed the greatest lustre on the memory of the Curé of Ars. And despite the fact that humility, poverty and mortification interwoven have furnished the material for our narrative, it appears to us to be essential that we should once more draw attention to these salient features of the character of the Curé of Ars.

To one who had not personally known the Curé of Ars, but had heard the tale of the marvels of which he was the central figure and which called forth the ovations of the multitude, it would be but natural to suppose that, living in an atmosphere of perpetual adulation, pride, if not his besetting sin, would be at least his temptation. What an effort must be required to remain humble in the midst of so many and such demonstrative signs of public veneration! We once hinted as much to him; he understood us at once and, raising his eyes to heaven with an expression of sadness and almost of discouragement, replied: "Ah! my friend, if only I were not rather tempted to despair!" Recollection, watchfulness, and union with God preserved him from self-glorification amid all the exterior manifestations of homage which he was powerless to avoid. Protected by his modesty, penetrated with a sense of his own nothingness, triumphing over all by contempt of self, he walked through the midst of this apotheosis in perfect peace and security; and his humility shone out with more striking brilliancy—a sincere humility born of horror for himself and his shortcomings, which unceasingly urged upon him his need of penance and humiliation.

He sought obscurity and silence with as much solicitude as most people bring to the attainment of popular favour and renown. He loved more to be humble than to appear so. It was impossible for the most searching gaze to detect even the most transient expression of weariness or annoyance, any appearance of pre-occupation, or the slightest suggestion of the complacencies or dissatisfactions of self-love. Of him it might have been said that

I no longer existed. No personal consideration ever ruffled his serenity ; whatever might be said or done in his regard, he appeared content.

" I received two letters by the same post," said he one day ; " the first alleged that I was a great saint, the second expressed the opinion that I was nothing more than a hypocrite and a charlatan. The former added nothing to me ; the latter took nothing away. One is, before God, what one is ; and nothing more." On another occasion he said : " The good God has chosen me to be the instrument by which His graces shall be conveyed to sinners, because I am the most ignorant and most worthless of men. Had there been in the diocese a priest more worthless than myself, God would have selected him."

These words breathe the spirit of the seraphic St. Francis, with whom our holy Curé had much in common. One day Brother Masseo, the companion whom the Saint called *the Lord's little lamb*, expressed his astonishment that all the world ran after him. " It is the doing," replied the Saint, " of the Most High, whose eyes behold the good and the bad over the entire world ; and because those all-holy eyes could not discern any one sinner more vile, more incapable or more wicked than myself. And since He was unable to find a more contemptible creature through whose agency to accomplish the wondrous work He had in contemplation, He has made choice of me, to confound the grandeur, strength, beauty and science of the world."

M. Vianney had surmounted the various degrees of humility ; he had come to hate himself sincerely and to see nothing in creation more contemptible than his own person. This led those who had to do with him—and whom he so well knew how to put at their ease by his simplicity and unconstraint—to be ever on their guard, lest they should let slip some remark that might wound his humility. Humility was with him a sixth sense and one of extreme delicacy—a sense to be respected if one desired to keep one's place in his heart. Not that he was capable of the smallest antipathy, but, at the same time, we think that habitual indulgence in saying " pretty things " to him would inevitably have resulted in some lessening of affection on his part. M. Vianney applied to himself, literally and personally, what he so often repeated in his catechisms. " When they speak evil of you they tell the truth, when they pay compliments they are laughing at you. Which is best for you—to be admonished or to be misled ? To be taken seriously or to be made game of ? "

He had so great a susceptibility on this point that it could only be compared to a virgin bashfulness. There is a modesty of soul as well as of body ; and the soul of the venerable Curé of Ars could not tolerate the public gaze—its chief beauty being humility, which the garish light of day wounds and weakens, just as delicate

colours fade and tarnish in the noonday sun. One can well imagine what a trial this incessant publicity must have been for this timid and sensitive soul. It afflicted him to the point of tears, and only with great difficulty did he become accustomed to it. Towards the end of his life and after several attempts of the same nature, he found himself the subject of a final biographical sketch, which annoyed him more than all its predecessors. Unable to contain his dismay, he said to the author: "So you are going to finish, then, by selling me in the market!"

Any praise was as a blow to the servant of God. If one was moved to say something complimentary to him he would respond briefly and humbly; but it was plain to see by his bearing and silence thereafter that the attempt had been unwelcome. One day Mgr. Devie so far forgot himself as to address him as "My holy Curé"! This was the last straw: "What misfortune is mine," he exclaimed; "everybody is mistaken about me—even my Bishop!"

More than once was he seen on Sundays, when the preacher said a word or two in appreciation of him, to flee precipitately from his stall in the choir, take refuge in the sacristy and shut himself in.

On no account could M. Vianney be induced to commence a conversation about himself. If interrogated he would reply with a modesty that counselled reserve on the subject and a laconicism which reduced his interlocutor to silence. Then he cut short any further discussion concerning himself and his doings by endeavouring to change the conversation. For the rest, he had contrived to exhaust his vocabulary of self-contempt and exercised his ingenuity in replenishing it with new terms. He was once speaking in praise of a priest for whom he had a great esteem and, in his picturesque language, described him as having the qualities of the swallow and the eagle.

"And yourself, Monsieur le Curé, what qualities should we find in you?"

"Oh! as for me! When it was decided to produce the Curé of Ars they combined the characteristics of a goose, a turkey and a lobster."

"How good you are," said the holy man to a missionary recently arrived at Ars, "in coming to help us like this!"

"Monsieur le Curé, not to speak of the pleasure of living near you, it is but a duty we are fulfilling."

"Oh! no, surely, it is a charity."

"Don't believe that, Monsieur le Curé, it is no charity on our part."

"Yes! I say. You can see very well that now you are here things go very well; but when I am left to myself they don't go at all. I am like the ciphers, which have no value except

there are figures beside them . . . I am too old and of no use now."

"Monsieur le Curé, you are still young in heart and mind."

"Yes, my friend, I can say with the saint when they asked how old he was that I have not yet lived one day."

On another occasion M. Vianney appeared more worn-out than usual; he had almost fainted in walking the short distance from the confessional to the presbytery. His ideas of flight and retirement revived, but outwardly he seemed even more gay, amiable and expansive than his wont. "Oh!" said he, taking the hands of his missionary, "if I were only in your place, I would fly away to heaven!" Then he continued, mournfully: "How much I am to be pitied! I don't know anyone more unhappy than myself!"

"Monsieur le Curé, there are many who would only be too pleased to change places with you!"

"Ah! my friend, they would but change their gold for brass."

In his desire to depreciate and belittle himself M. Vianney constantly used the word *poor*. It was always his *poor* soul, his *poor* carcase, his *poor* misery, his *poor* sins. He was unceasing in his recognition of his own defects, and, to believe him, his whole life would not have been long enough to lament them; he had, in fact, nothing but accusations to make against himself; he reproached himself bitterly. One would have thought that his life had been passed in sin, that he was the most vile and worthless of sinners. "How good is God," he would often say, "to bear with my immense miseries!"

For the benefit of those who are astonished to find that a man whose life was always irreproachable should have so little regard for himself and condemn himself in such unsparing terms we would observe that the more perfect souls, being nearer to God and consequently receiving more vivid illumination, are better able to discern on the one hand the greatness and the sanctity of the Almighty, and on the other their own profound unworthiness; that the purer a heart the more easily it detects the smallest stain; in the same way as the lightest mark is painfully apparent on a white garment. This explains the reason why the just and perfect, who lived absolutely innocent lives, could without any exaggeration or breach of truth talk of themselves in language that seems fanciful and forced; and nearly all of them have done so. The mole-hills of their own least imperfections attained the proportions of mountains in their eyes. To their loving hearts their venial faults were mortal sins. The language of Christian repentance did not afford them any sufficient expression in which to vindicate the honour of God except by exaggeration of their own infidelities. Thus St. Teresa in her retreat in Castille accused herself of the troubles which an

apostate monk had brought upon Germany. St. Bernard feared at every moment lest the earth should open and swallow him up, and prayed that God would not punish the villages through which he passed on his account. St. Martin attributed all the evils that happened in his own times to his own sins.

It is beautiful to speak thus of oneself, but only provided one really thinks what one says. The proof of sincerity in this matter is found in the fact that one is pleased to know what others actually think and say of one. Thus it was noticeable that M. Vianney bore a special affection for those who criticised and underrated him, opposed or found fault with his plans or managed to cause him trouble or annoyance. He loved them as the saints loved their crosses. He so sincerely believed that the whole world had the right to treat him with contempt that he would have been afflicted in right earnest had he not been so treated. He asked his missionaries in all good faith to reprove him ; and often complained that they failed to do so.

Humility is persuaded that reproaches and bad treatment are the only things to which one has a right. The slightest kindness seems an inestimable favour to one who has a sincere and delicate sense of his own unworthiness. This explains the seeming effusiveness on the part of the Curé of Ars in the expression of his gratitude for the smallest attention paid to him : " You teach me," said he, to his missionaries, " what true charity is."

M. Vianney was one of the very few who speak of humility humbly. Someone asked him : " Monsieur le Curé, what must one do in order to become good ?"

" My friend, one must really love the good God."

" And what must one do in order to love the good God ?"

" Ah ! my friend, humility ! humility ! It is our pride that prevents us becoming saints. Pride is the chaplet on which all the vices are strung and humility is the chain that binds together all the virtues. Alas ! it passes comprehension how such poor creatures as ourselves can be proud." (Here he wept). " The devil appeared to St. Macarius, armed with a whip as if to beat him, and said : ' I do nearly everything that you do : you fast but I never eat at all ; you keep vigils and I never go to bed. But there is one thing you do that I can't do.' ' And what is that ?' ' Humble myself,' replied the devil, wherewith he disappeared . . . Ah ! my friend, there are saints who put the devil to flight merely by saying : Alas ! how poor and miserable I am !"

Here are some of the remarks of the servant of God on the same subject :—

" Humility is like a balance, the more one lowers one scale the higher the other one rises.

" Those who humiliate us are our friends, not those who belaud us.

"A saint was asked which was the first of virtues. 'It is,' replied he, 'humility.' 'And the second?' 'Humility.' 'And the third?' 'Humility.'

"Never shall we understand our poor misery. The mere thought of it makes one tremble! God gives us no more than a mere glimpse. If we really knew ourselves as He knows us we could not live; we should die of fright. The saints knew themselves better than others and that is why they were humble."

The Curé of Ars rarely gave advice or direction without adding some encouragement to the practice of humility. Thus we find him writing to Sœur Guillard, of the Hospice at Villefranche, who had written to ask admission to the *Providence* for a little orphan girl:

"Ma très respectable Sœur,

" It would be difficult for me to refuse what you ask when I reflect how good you have been to me and mine, more especially as you are enabling me in some small way to satisfy the divine justice for my sins at the same time. You can send the poor little thing; we will receive her with pleasure and take good care of her.

"Before closing this letter which I, all miserable as I am, have the honour to address to you I would say that, being very poor myself, I have great need that someone should entreat the heavenly Father to deign to grant me a share of the infinite merits of His divine Son. I hardly dare to ask you to present my most humble respects to all your venerable sisters of the good God and recommend me to their holy prayers.

"For yourself, my good sister, I would urge you to love the good God with all your heart, for you can never love Him enough. You tell me that you are poor. Happy is the one who has the good fortune to know her poverty! for all our unhappiness comes from not knowing ourselves for what we are. But what should console us in a great degree is that we have a good Father, who loves us well. Call to him, then, from the depths of our poverty and he will certainly succour us.

"If I had to advise you, my good sister, my advice would be to practise humility as much as you can. In doing what you do see that you always do the will of the Master and not your own. Be full of charity for your excellent sisters; exercise abundance of kindness; make your life a continual renunciation. Be content to suffer humiliation at every turn in everything you undertake. You will be twice blessed if the good God makes you understand the treasure that lies hidden in humility!

VIANNEY, Curé of Ars."

M. Vianney was convinced, like all the saints before him, that the heart's one treasure is detachment; that sacrifice does not

here mean destruction, but vivification ; that obstacles must be cleared away and the chains that bind the soul to things finite broken if liberty of soul is to be attained. He understood the words of the Gospel : " He that loveth his life shall lose it ; and he that hateth his life in this world keepeth it unto life eternal." He was detached from things and from himself in order to recover both in God. The truly poor man has the world at his feet, for he rises superior to its good things.

In this age of sensuality it was perfectly apparent to the Curé of Ars that *matter* was more than ever the enemy of God. When he had to utter the word it was noticed that he did so with marked emphasis, and one felt the disgust and distaste it inspired in him. Day by day he sought to render himself more independent of it ; he ate but little, hardly slept at all, asked for nothing, appeared to have no wants—one would have said that he was a soul without a body.

To satisfy his love of poverty no doubt Almighty God permitted that throughout his life—save only the days of his youth, which were passed beneath the paternal roof—he should live by alms. At Écully, at Noës, above all at Ars, he found people only too happy to give him that bread of charity which he was only too happy to receive at their hands. At Ars Catherine, with the help of a few generous souls, provided the trifle of food he needed and took care of his wardrobe, such as it was.

The hearth of his kitchen never saw a fire. Of the various apartments in the presbytery the only one habitable was his bed-chamber. Even the poor furniture which garnished that one was not his own ; it had all been sold and bought back again several times. No religious with a vow of poverty could have had a more modest cell. In this comfortless, smoke-blackened room, lit by two curtainless windows, everything had and still has an air of age and dilapidation. A few artless paintings on glass, the pictures of our Lord, our Lady and his *good saints*, portraits of the Bishops of Belley, were disposed about the walls—walls covered with a paper of ancient date that rivalled the rest in worn-out and discoloured appearance. Opposite the door a few shelves held a number of old books ; in the further corner a time-stained press, the drawers of which—constantly re-filled and emptied—contained his store of medals and crosses ; in the centre an oaken table.

On setting foot for the first time in this interior, at once so pious and so poor, people were often strangely moved. It was like entering a sanctuary, as a sanctuary indeed it was—a sanctuary of all the evangelical virtues. There was light for the spirit and instruction for the heart, and it might be said without exaggeration that this poverty-stricken room and miserable-looking furniture have worked conversions. We have known

penitents at the mere sight of it all to fall on their knees, strike their forehead on the floor and water it with their tears.

A friend of the notary charged with the duty of making an inventory of M. Vianney's property after his decease wrote to him :—

" You can well understand what a touching and pious recollection I treasure of the venerable Curé, whose tomb and dwelling we visited together . . . I confess that in considering what I saw I take occasion to bless my own poverty and lament my own spiritual deficiencies which, from time to time, induce me to regret the loss of the goods which God did me the grace of taking from me The voluntary pauper covers the compulsory one with shame. And yet these goods with which I have parted were, to say the least, only so many encumbrances. One feels lighter for upward flight in the stripping of them. It is difficult for poor human nature to understand such things. The idea *Cum infirmor tunc potens sum** is revolting to it.

" The *Saint* of Ars was the depository of very considerable funds and with a magnificence of detachment of which posterity will begrudge us the spectacle founded more good works than any other apostle of charity in his humble position, no matter where. We should have to go back to that other curé of the Dombes, St. Vincent de Paul, to find another poor man so prolific of rich foundations.

" I often return in spirit to that poor chamber, which we both had the happiness of visiting on that 7th October, 1859; and behold the bed that was but as a stepping-stone to heaven, the little table on which was the earthen porringer and the slice of bread that formed the last meal for the holy man. What a day for us! The more I feel the sands of my life running out the greater is my consolation at having been your companion on that occasion . . . I am most grateful to you for it!"

Money only came to M. Vianney because he contemned it and because he never sought it either as a means or an end, being fully persuaded that " all these things " are added to him who seeks first the kingdom of God and His justice. He regarded it solely as a possible instrument of evangelisation and salvation; any other application of it was displeasing to him. In speaking of a considerable sum that he had cheerfully renounced he added:

" If only they would use it to polish souls! but . . . they will use it to polish stones!"

One day M. Vianney accidentally used a bank-note to light his candle and when someone expressed regret for the contre-temps in his presence, exclaimed: " Oh! there is less harm in that than if I had committed the slightest venial sin."

*When I become weak then am I strong indeed. (II. Cor. xii., 10).

Another day he approached us with this delightful story : " This morning a great lady who had much more than a hundred francs in rings on her fingers came to me with : ' Monsieur le Curé, some time ago I gave you one hundred francs to obtain my cure. I am not cured. Give me back my money ! ' "

" And you actually gave it back ! "

" Why surely ! Luckily somebody had given me a hundred francs only a minute or two before and I made haste to fetch it. "

" And you gave no expression of opinion to the noble lady ? "

" I was particularly careful not to do that. "

" But perhaps she was an impostor ! "

" No ; what she said was quite true—she had given me a hundred francs in gold. I recollect it well enough. "

The Curé of Ars was perfectly disinterested even in good works. He said to a charitable lady who offered to take a share of his foundations on herself : " I have no need of your money ; and you will easily find a use for it. You have quite enough to do at home. "

Catherine made an attempt to replace the earthen porringer which the servant of God had used for many years by a china cup. He looked askance at this, as savouring of luxury, and got rid of it as soon as possible, saying : " One must never cease to be poor in one's household affairs ! "

And in this we see an illustration of one of the most striking features of his career.

CHAPTER XLVIII

HOW M. VIANNEY WAS MORTIFIED, GENTLE AND PATIENT

You are not in the flesh but in the spirit For if you live according to the flesh, you shall die : but if by the spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live. (Rom. viii, 9, 13)

The man becomes a spirit, although that spirit is contained by a body. It is contained by a mere body, without anything carnal, gross, or earthly adhering to it. (St. John Chrys. *Hom. XVIII. in I ad Cor.*)

WHEN our Lord said to His Apostles : " I came not to send peace but the sword " (Matt. x., 34) He was not speaking of the sword of the Gospel, but of another sword, one with which He has armed His Church, as a powerful means of attack and defence in the spiritual warfare. " Mortify therefore your members which are upon earth," says St. Paul (Col. iii., 5) ; and, better still : " Always bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies." (II Cor., iv., 10).

—The world talks in vain ; uselessly does it gird both at the precept and practice of mortification. It cannot contend that the precept is not contained in the Gospel nor deny that the practice is the essence of all Christianity. For ages has the world asked : To what purpose all these austerities ? In defect of any explanation that seems satisfactory it has decided to regard the whole family of penitents—whose mortified life is a standing reproach to its own sensuality and love of luxurious ease—as fanatics. For ages also have the saints, utterly heedless of the world's opinions on the subject, continued to enslave their body in order to emancipate the soul. The benefit they derive from such a course of action is a profound contempt for the fears and faintheartedness which deter the greater number—and might have deterred themselves—from advancing along the road to greater things.

Never would M. Vianney have been such as the story of his life shows him ; never would he have accomplished a hundredth part of the marvels that marked his long and miraculous career, had he not been mortified. Mortification and humility were the foundations of his sanctity and the two most powerful forces of his life.

It is by the conquest of nature and entire subjugation of the body that grace establishes her sovereign dominion in the soul. Those who live the life of sense pour themselves out upon their immediate surroundings and do not find God. It is only when we have given all and sacrificed all that He enters the soul, bringing

His sublime gifts with Him. The Curé of Ars understood this, and in him the whole man was mortified—heart, mind and senses. Of that great soul it might have been said that it was absolute master of the body in which it lived. As far as he was concerned the body was nothing ; he never called it by any other name than his *carcase*, and treated it accordingly. There was the whole theory of mortification in that word, which he uttered with the most sincere and heartfelt disdain. He would never allow anybody to ask for news of his *carcase*. “Adam is always in good health,” he would say. Although subject to cruel intestinal pains, they never hindered his work ; he concerned himself so little about them that they might have belonged to somebody else ; never evinced the least sign of anything wrong, and it was only by chance that one perceived it.

One day M. Charles de Montbriant, returning from a tour in Dauphiné, came to Ars expressly to learn the news of the holy Curé. He knocked at the door of the confessional. Out came M. Vianney, who followed him into the sacristy : “Monsieur le Curé, my family are anxious to know how you are.” “Nothing more than that, Monsieur le Comte ? Please don’t put yourself out another time for such a trifle.” And with a respectful bow he went out without another word.

We have already seen that since the days of his earliest youth the austere delights of penance had revealed themselves to the heart of our *Saint*. Initiated during his rough life in the fields, it had early developed into a habit with him. Since that time the charm had gone on increasing. “In this matter it is only the first step that costs anything,” he said. “Mortification has a balm and savour about it that one can never renounce, once they have been experienced ; one wants to drain the cup to the bottom . . . There is only one way of giving oneself to God by the practice of renunciation and sacrifice ; it is to give oneself entirely, without keeping anything for oneself. The little one does retain only serves to embarrass and cause suffering . . . I often think I should like to be able to lose myself completely and only recover myself in God.”

M. Vianney had come to practise literally all that one hears tell of the saints, and which often seems much more like legendary fantasy than historic truth. The penitential spirit which had become natural in him had transformed him into a living holocaust, never so happy in his union with God as when he found fresh opportunities of manifesting his love by some fresh immolation. He made it a rule never to smell a flower, never to drink when suffering from extreme thirst, never to drive away a fly, appear to perceive a fetid odour, evince disgust at a repulsive sight, nor to complain of anything whatever that might disturb his comfort, never to sit, never to rest on his elbows when kneeling.

The Curé of Ars was very sensitive to cold, but he would never allow of any precautions against it. During a particularly rigorous winter one of the missionaries contrived a movable board in the floor of his Curé's confessional, beneath which was inserted a hot-water bottle. The ruse succeeded to admiration; the holy man never suspected. On the contrary:—"How good God is!" said he, tenderly. "My feet have been quite warm all the winter—such cold weather as we have had too!"

Another devoted friend of the holy Curé was not so fortunate. Having found out that the indefatigable workman of the Lord suffered considerably from the long hours he passed sitting in one position in the bare hard confessional, he essayed to make it a little less uncomfortable by lining the inner walls with soft pads. When he found them in position next day the Curé of Ars in pious indignation tore them all down and consigned them to oblivion.

The more M. Vianney afflicted himself by these unsparing mortifications the more he appeared to seek fresh methods of suffering. Almighty God sent them.

In a letter written in 1840 we read:—

"The sight of the suffering of our holy Curé is heart-rending. It is impossible either to see or hear of them without an intense pity, mingled with admiration for such sublime and continual sacrifice. It is ever with the same zeal, the same resignation, the same sweetness, that he allows himself to be surrounded and jostled by the constantly-increasing crowd, anxious to obtain a last word of advice, a last blessing.

"We ask ourselves, will he be able to continue the instruction and prayers every evening till the end of Lent? And that worn-out voice! Will it not depart from our midst to intone the eternal *Alleluia*? And in very truth one knows not whether to hope or to fear, so feeble and exhausted does the holy penitent appear. His doctor has discovered the seeds of sundry serious maladies, every one of them bringing terrible sufferings in its train. You would have wept yesterday to see him sink down in his seat during the singing of the *Vexilla*. I thought that it was the last occasion on which he would salute that Cross—his only hope. The contractions of his features showed plainly the extent of his pains. Suddenly he recovered himself and, with a voice broken by suffering, proclaimed to us in accents of fire the might of prayer.

"As the Curé of Misérieux remarked recently, the continuance of such an existence can only be explained by a miracle. Never has the concourse been so prodigious. Men surround his confessional in masses. The church is full day and night . . ."

Some time afterwards the same person wrote:—

"The sanctity of our Curé continues to increase and his nourishment tends to decrease . . . Pertinant came in to say he doesn't know what to do because the good Curé, who is suffering

agonies, will have it that it is unnecessary to send for the doctor and wants him to extract three teeth for him with a pair of pincers. One of these teeth was in fact extracted and found filled with grass ! ”

One day Madame la Comtesse des Garets having noticed that her Curé coughed a great deal sent her maid with a bottle of syrup for him. “What is this ? ” asked M. Vianney. “. . . Take it back to Madame at once with my grateful thanks. Ask her to say a *Pater* and *Ave* for her poor Curé ; that will do him more good.”

During his convalescence they used to send him little delicacies suitable to his condition. “Take them,” said he, “to Mère Gonot (a poor woman in the parish). She has much more need of them than I have.”

A few days previously he had been much put about by reason of the appearance on his bed of a mattress and bolster—both sent from the château. In holy indignation he had thrown these superfluities on the floor in the middle of the room. As the maid, who had only done as she was told by her employers in bringing them, did not dare to appear in his presence, he sent for her and asked pardon for his roughness.

M. Vianney himself admitted to the Abbé Tailhades that during one very cold winter both his feet froze. “When I leave my confessional,” he added, “I have to feel for my legs, to make sure that I have any. I cannot keep upright, and get out of the church by catching hold of the benches and chairs . . . Bah ! in heaven we shall be well compensated and not give a thought to all this.”

The same informant told us that M. Vianney suffered dreadfully from intestinal pains and only ascended the stairs to his room with great difficulty. The Abbé Tailhades once offered his arm. “Oh ! no,” said he, “I have got up these stairs many times before. Besides, I manage very well when there is nobody here.” “Perhaps,” replied his companion, “you have only got what you asked for, eh ? ” (M. Tailhades had heard that the Curé of Ars had volunteered to endure every sort of suffering for the conversion and salvation of his parishioners.) M. Vianney replied : “It may well be so. Some years ago I said to the good God : ‘Only grant me the conversion of my parish and I consent to suffer anything you wish, until the end of my life.’ ” At other times he would say : “I would willingly accept a hundred years of the most intolerable suffering, provided the good God would deign to grant me the conversion of my parish.”

We have ourselves seen M. Vianney gay and in good spirits, talking with his accustomed amiability and not permitting a sign of the terrible pains he was suffering to escape him up to the moment when, completely overcome, he sank suddenly on a chair. To all our anxious inquiries he contented himself by replying, with a sweet smile : “Yes, I am suffering—a little.”

The holy man spent himself without measure or reserve. When after a crushing day's work a message was brought to him that a sick man wished to speak with him he would go at once to visit him. We have seen him, bent double and forced to halt at every step, drag himself to the further end of the village to fulfil the duties of his heroic ministry.

A brief night—a night of some three or four hours—succeeded to the protracted labours of the day. What passed then in the austere solitude of the little room we have described no one knows and no one ever ventured to try and discover. There is reason to believe that after having given his day to man, the Curé of Ars sought in God the recuperation of which soul and body stood in such especial need. In that poor chamber without doubt the Master made ample compensation for all the sacrifices of His servant and consoled him in spirit for all the bodily fatigue so willingly endured for His sake.

But as regards the poor *carcase* M. Vianney often declared that he never had two hours' sleep, and that a single one sufficed to *make him gallop*. What he endured during the heats of summer when, exhausted by continual preaching he lay extended on his wretched bed of straw, none can tell. He owned to us that he suffered to the last extremity—being able to do nothing but cough. Bathed in perspiration, vainly endeavouring to find ease by constant change of position, he would get up four or five times an hour, and become so feeble and worn out as to be unable to stand. It has happened that he collapsed and fell several times between his room and the church. This state of prostration never abated and eventually brought about the end.

—It was characteristic of the constitution of the Curé of Ars that it possessed some nervous or elastic force which only bent for an instant in order to recover itself directly. He was never so near the recovery of his original vitality as when it seemed well-nigh extinct. The crowd, the heat, the constant pressure from every direction, the prolonged sittings in the confessional—all these things and more ought to have annihilated him completely, but they only seemed to lend him strength. In proportion as the exigencies of the pilgrimage demanded it so he was seen to rise superior to human infirmity and surpass himself. Like St. Francis of Sales, M. Vianney could say : "God is so good to me that He deigns to work a little miracle in my behalf every night. When I retire I feel inert in body and spirit, so exhausted am I ; and next morning I rise more cheerful and vigorous than ever."

The years that inaugurated the apostolate of the servant of God were the great period of his austerities. We have already spoken of them, and only return to the subject now in order to add some details which escaped us then.

What he allowed his body in those early days of his ministry

amounted not so much to the means of preserving it in life as to the means of preventing it from perishing entirely. Returning from the church one evening in a worn-out condition and having eaten a potato, he was tempted to take another from the mouldy collection in the basket, but he refrained, saying : " One is enough for necessity, a second would be for satisfaction."

Catherine Lassagne used to regret the omission in her notes of the several occasions on which she, having served the holy Curé with his modest repast, noticed that he, after conveying a morsel of food to his mouth, would pause motionless as one in ecstasy. She allowed herself to say : " Eat, Monsieur le Curé, eat ! " On which, emerging from his recollection, he would reply with a sigh : " Ah ! our Lord said He had another kind of nourishment."

" I am attempting the impossible," wrote the Abbé Courbon to Mademoiselle d'Ars, in 1820, " in trying to induce M. Vianney to alter his mode of life ; it is labour in vain. His friends have been no more successful. He listens, but goes his own way. Let him go to Salles then.* I should like to see him in better health, but it is too much to hope for."

To fasting M. Vianney added other austerities. He owned to his missionary that he sometimes slept on a handful of straw in the cellar and when one side was sore he turned over on the other.

Jeanne-Marie Chaney and Catherine Lassagne attest the finding in M. Vianney's room of divers instruments of penance : hair-shirts to wit, iron chains, a knotted cord with an iron ball attached. In the same hiding-place they unearthed four or five iron disciplines, polished by use to the brightness of silver—the tails of these disciplines being armed with pieces of iron or lead. They affirm also that they saw M. Vianney's linen stained with blood when it went to be washed.

On one quite exceptional occasion Mademoiselle Lacon was summoned to pass the night in the presbytery. An unknown individual who asserted himself to be a priest had been given hospitality by the servant of God, who nevertheless was suspicious of him. These suspicions were well-founded, for the gentleman made off furtively next morning. For two whole hours Mademoiselle Lacon heard M. Vianney flog himself remorselessly. Now he seemed about to cease ; then he went on with greater energy than before. The unseen and discreet witness of the scene was in tears the while. " Will he never have done ? " she said to herself.

The holy Curé said to Catherine and her companions on one occasion : " In the morning I am obliged to administer two or three strokes of the discipline to make my *carcase* go ; that stirs

*It may be remembered that about the time M. Courbon wrote, there had been a question of M. Vianney becoming Curé of Salles—to the great disquiet of Mademoiselle d'Ars.

up the fibres . . . Have you never seen bear-leaders? You know how they tame those savage beasts—by vigorous application of the stick. One reduces the body to order in the same way, and so tames the old Adam within.”

“I don’t know exactly in what year it was,” says a reliable witness, “but it was a long time ago that the Curé of Ars ordered the village blacksmith to make him a chain, the dimensions of which made the initiated shiver; for they knew well enough that it was to be used as a discipline. To the blacksmith himself he gave some explanation or other, so that there might be no suspicion as to the ultimate purpose of the chain. He was obliged to renew his penitential apparatus very frequently, because the force with which he applied them soon broke them up.”

If towards the close of his career—when his life seemed to be continued more by miracle than anything else in the midst of his prodigious labours—the servant of God somewhat relaxed his severity towards himself, it was only because this upright and prudent soul had come to understand that the infirmities and ills of old age are perpetual penances in themselves, reserved for us by God; and that He chooses infinitely better for us than we could choose for ourselves. Besides which he submitted to the change in deference to the orders of his superiors, in which he always saw the will of God; but it cost him much. He frequently reproached himself with *greediness*. In the words of the person who kept house for him: “One could hardly believe how little he ate; not a pound of bread during the week; sometimes he only drank. He never took meat two days running. Whole weeks passed in which he never touched it.” Alluding to the slight modifications in his diet, introduced towards the end of his life, he would say: “If I had done that some time back, I should have died of chagrin very nearly.”

Mgr. Devie often endeavoured to soften the austerities of the Curé of Ars a little. He would have the visits paid him by the holy penitent made occasion for at least some relaxation. He placed him next himself at table and waited upon him with his own hands. The poor Curé complied and ate in some sort like ordinary mortals; but a few hours later the Bishop learned with consternation the suffering his paternal solicitude had occasioned. Then, with the kindly charity which pointed everything he did, he said: “Fast in peace, my friend; henceforward I will never compel you to dine with me.” And from that time it was always the Bishop who came to see M. Vianney at the presbytery, so as not to cause him to lose his time. And his successors had the same regard for the precious moments of the Curé of Ars.

One infallible test of virtue, one never susceptible of illusion nor of the promptings of self-love, and one, moreover, eminently instructive in the present instance, is that the Curé of Ars had the

same delight in mortification and suffering when they were not of his own choosing. On every occasion of humiliation, privation, affliction or affront, he suffered in silence and serenity of soul. In fact, in his patience alone, amid trials great and small—calumny, unjust criticism of his conduct, the contradictions that beset the outset of his ministry—and without regard to anything else, one can distinguish the characteristics, not only of a saint, but a very great saint.

Never was he observed to be sensible of any outrage that directly affected himself. He seemed equally proof against either annoyance or blandishment. If anyone had done him wrong or treated him unjustly he not only regarded the offence as nothing, but excused it with such an indulgence as might have appeared altogether excessive. But our Lord accepted and blessed his good intention without doubt.

One day he received a letter full of abuse ; a short time after he received another breathing respect and veneration, in which the writer called him a saint. He told the story to his daughters at the *Providence*. "See," said he, "the danger of paying attention to human opinion. This morning, had I regarded the insults addressed to me, I should have lost my tranquillity ; while if I had allowed myself to be overcome by compliments, I should have been grievously tempted to pride in the afternoon. Oh ! how prudent is he who refuses to take any notice of the unprofitable criticisms and flatteries of men but makes no account of either one or the other !"

In the days when he was overborne by trials and contradictions he was once on the point of addressing a letter to his bishop, which might have relieved him of some of the annoyances and prevented their recurrence. The letter was written, but when it was brought to him for signature he tore it up, saying : "To-day is Friday, the day on which our Lord carried His Cross ; I must carry mine too. On this day the chalice of humiliation is less bitter."

M. Vianney used to avow that he was naturally of an impetuous disposition and that he had to do extreme violence to himself in order to become gentle and patient. And yet we have seen him encompassed and jostled by the crowd without even the shadow of annoyance manifesting itself in his countenance. We have seen him, too, at the moment when his confessional was the most heavily besieged, put himself out three times in succession to give Holy Communion to three different persons who might easily have presented themselves together—and that without remark, complaint, or the slightest mark of impatience. This spectacle appealed so powerfully to a witness of it that he quitted the church in a sudden burst of anger, which he thus explained : "I am enraged on behalf of M. le Curé, who isn't !" We have beheld

him, again, more than importuned—actually harassed—every moment of the day by the same individual, who wanted to obtain of him something he did not see fit to grant. She evinced an obstinacy beyond all bounds and consequently irritating to the last degree. M. Vianney did not yield the point, but his firmness was only equalled by his sweetness ; and each time she approached him received her as if it had been the first.

One can form no idea of all the absurdities and even rudenesses that some people presumed to utter, even before his face : that he was ignorant, that he was a fool, that before making his acquaintance they had conceived rather a high opinion of him, which had vanished when they came to know him, and so on. These impertinences he heard with joy and repeated publicly with an air so gracious and full of conviction that it was only right he should be treated so, that one is at a loss which to admire most, his profound humility or his invincible patience.

M. Vianney ever insisted most strongly on death to self and renunciation of one's own will.

“ The only thing we really have of our own,” said he, “ is our will—the only thing we can take from our inmost heart, to offer in homage to the good God. Be assured that a single act of renunciation of the will is more pleasing to Him than thirty days of fasting.

“ Every time we renounce our own will to do that of another—provided it be not contrary to the law of God—we acquire great merit, and merit known to God alone. What is it that renders religious life so meritorious? Nothing but the renunciation of the will at every moment ; the continual death of that which is most lively in us. And I often think that the life of some poor domestic servant who knows no will but that of others may be—if only she understands how to profit by it—quite as agreeable to God as that of a religious who is always confronted with her rule.

“ Even in the world one can find occasions of renunciation of our own will at every turn. One can forgo a visit that would give pleasure to oneself ; do some work of charity that is distasteful ; go to bed two minutes later or get up two minutes earlier ; when one has a choice of two things give the preference to that which is less pleasing.

“ I have known beautiful souls in the world who had no longer a will of their own ; who were dead to self. That is how saints are made. Look at that good little St. Maurus, so powerful with God and so dear to his superior on account of his simplicity and obedience. The other religious were jealous of him, but the superior said to them : ‘ I will show you why I have so great an esteem for that dear little brother.’ He then made the round of the cells. Everyone had something to finish before he opened his door—everyone except St. Maurus, who was engaged in copying

Holy Scripture and left his work instantly to answer the call of St. Benedict.

“It is only the first step that costs anything in this path of abnegation. When once it is entered upon matters go of themselves ; and when one has acquired this virtue one possesses everything.”

M. Vianney had the right to speak in this fashion. If it be true that the love of ease is the dominating passion of man, if he only works in order to arrive at rest, what a victory must our *Saint* have gained over himself in overcoming the temptation that would draw him to solitude—a temptation which had for complement his humility on the one hand and his yearning for a more perfect life on the other, one more distant from men and nearer to God ! Although he was detached as much as might be from the world and external things, their very contact bore hardly upon him. No matter ! he submitted by conformity to the will of God. Herein is true virtue : not insensibility to the pains and fatigues of the purgative way, nor to the sweetness and joy of the unitive, but a stern hard preference given to the austere practice of duty, because duty is the very law of God. It is not the stoical virtue of the ancients which from the heights of its affected indifference cries to suffering : “Thou art nought but a figure of speech !” Recognising that suffering is an evil, a man suffers, fears, struggles with effort, experiences mortal repugnances ; but he submits, saying : “All that Thou wouldst, my God ! as Thou wouldst, when Thou wouldst ! Not my will but Thine be done.”

CHAPTER XLIX

INFUSED QUALITIES OF M. VIANNEY. HIS INTUITION. HIS PRESCIENCE. HIS GIFTS

For many things are shewn to thee above the understanding of men. (Ecclus. iii., 25.)

If thou wert good and pure within, then wouldst thou discern all things without impediment, and understand them aright. A pure heart penetrates heaven and hell. (Imitation of Christ, Bk. II., ch. iv.)

WHEN Theodoret was about to write the life of one of our greatest wonder-workers hesitation seized him ; he doubted the prudence of exposing truth to the profanation of those pretenders to wisdom who, being unwilling to admit any element of the divine in the world, refuse to recognise anything in the nature of the miraculous there. Then—impelled by the absolute certainty of the matters he had to relate on the one hand and by the number of those who, instructed in the mysteries of God, were worthy to know the marvels He effects in the hearts of the just and would profit by them on the other—he resolved to continue. The same considerations inspire us with a like security. It is not becoming that the glories of Him who is admirable in His saints should be buried in oblivion. Of all the extraordinary occurrences of which we are the historian, the direct manifestations of the power of God—revelations, prophecies, supernatural gifts and lights—are by no means the most difficult of belief. But such heroic constancy amid incessant labours, the spirit that sought itself in nothing, the heart so humble as to desire to be despised and overlooked, and to be sincerely disappointed when it was not sufficiently so—these should be matters so astonishing to those who have studied the human heart in the light of their own as to render the first-mentioned occurrences merely a corollary to a life so perfect.

At the same time we are not unmindful that we are entering upon a region in which Christian prudence imposes upon us the duty of walking with the utmost circumspection, the torch of criticism in hand. Therefore we are careful to retail only that which we have received from the lips of reliable persons who bear witness to what they have seen and heard.

The divine and infused lights received by the Curé of Ars had ordinarily for their object the direction of souls, which was his ministry par excellence. The following is an incident vouched for by our colleague, M. l'abbé Toccanier :—

A young woman from Savoy had come to Lyons to be present at the ceremony of the clothing of her sister just entering La Trappe ; and before returning home wished to see the Curé

of Ars. For several years she had thought of entering religion herself, and desired to have the advice of the servant of God. At the moment she arrived M. Vianney was reciting night prayers. Descending from the pulpit at the end of them and passing a group of pilgrims, he noticed her in their midst, and said: "My child, I will certainly talk to you to-morrow." The young woman, thinking it was a mistake, took little heed of his words. Next morning she came to the church in time for the catechism without the least idea of anything special happening. M. le Curé was reciting his breviary; suddenly he caught sight of her, summoned her by a sign and said he had something to say to her. His prayers finished, he conducted her to the confessional and opened the subject with:—

"My child, you have always desired to be a religious, then?"

"I, Father? How do you know that? I have not had the pleasure of speaking to you yet."

"Oh! my little one, you have two sisters who are very pious, especially the younger of them; she is an angel!"

Judge of the astonishment of this girl! She could hardly contain herself for delight and departed with the words of the Samaritan woman on her lips: "I have seen a man who told me all things whatsoever I did." But as she quitted Ars without the missionary having been able to obtain speech with her it was necessary to endeavour to extract the main facts from the holy man himself. "Monsieur le Curé, the good God seems to know very well how to get people in before their turn when they come here with a lively faith. What a privileged person was that young woman from Annecy! How happy she was when she left Ars!" "That's true," replied M. Vianney, with a smile; "the good girl was very much pleased with herself."

"They tell me that when you passed her you discerned who she was and accosted her, saying: 'My child, I will see you to-morrow.' And when she came, before your catechism next day, you spoke to her of her attraction for religious life, of her family and of her sister, who is a saint."

"Oh! yes. And besides that she is very pious herself, the dear child."

"But, Monsieur le Curé, how could you know all this when she has never been at Ars before?"

"Well, my friend, it seems that I must have done the same as Pilate: prophesied without knowing. The almanacs, too, foretell both fine weather and foul; and on occasions their forecast happens to turn out correct."

Needless to say, no one was in the least convinced by this ingenious explanation.

In the Convent of the Visitation at Bourg are several religious who, having had recourse to the servant of God, obtained signal

graces in which was revealed in a striking manner his marvellous gift of prescience. One of them related the story of her vocation thus :—

“ Having always been haunted by the presentiment that the Curé of Ars would tell me the day of my death I would never go to him. The thought of it had always filled me with horror, for death had been the terror of my life for several years past, the skeleton at every feast, the black cloud which overhung every joy. When my proud spirit was sufficiently broken and humiliated to deserve that God should speak to it I heard His voice ; and the cloister which had always seemed to me worse than death now appeared the only refuge in which I could henceforth rest and contemplate death without misgiving. In this frame of mind I left for Ars.

“ I approached the holy Curé with such entire faith and was so firmly resolved to receive whatever he should say as from an oracle that he could not fail to be inspired by my complete confidence in him. When I found myself in his presence I was seized with a feeling of religious terror mingled with veneration, and to such a degree that I could not remember what it was I came for. I knelt down as much to recover myself as to receive his blessing ; but I really did not know where I was. He said :—

“ ‘ What is it you want, my child ? ’

“ ‘ I have come, Father, to consult you about a vocation. ’

“ ‘ And for whom ? ’

“ ‘ For myself, Father. ’

“ ‘ For yourself ! Go and get four planks. ’

“ ‘ Four planks ! ’ cried I, with an indescribable feeling of terror.

“ ‘ Yes, four planks. ’

“ ‘ But Father, I don’t understand you. ’ And indeed I was no longer capable of understanding anything ; the ground appeared sinking from under my feet ; my brain was in a whirl ; and the holy Curé seemed to me as a being not of this world. I wished I had something to cling to, for I thought I was going to collapse altogether. He continued :

“ ‘ It seems that you have already three of them and only need a fourth to cover you—do you understand now ? ’

“ I uttered a cry ; the familiar spectre of death was before me. He added, in the grave and almost severe tone he had adopted hitherto : ‘ The idea of death troubles you then, my child ? ’ Then, with a radiant face and in a gentler voice : ‘ Ah ! death ! it is the union of the soul with God ! ’

“ ‘ But I wish to die in the cloister. ’

“ ‘ And where ? At the Visitation ? Ah ! yes, it is such a beautiful life ! Quite close to here there is a convent that awaits you. Go, my child, you will do well there. ’

"Where had M. Vianney learned that I was thinking of the Visitation? That I had already made two retreats there? What was more remarkable still was that I went away quite peaceful and just as though the *Saint* had not spoken of the thing I dreaded. And walking alone through the little village, I said to myself: 'It is to thee that the Curé of Ars has just announced that thou wilt die very soon.' But nothing could disturb the supernatural peace that now possessed me.

"You know, Father, how, having penetrated my inmost soul, the holy Curé opened his catechism later with the words: 'We must all die, and we know not the hour . . . ' Then he enlarged upon the subject, speaking of the terrors death has for the world and the joys it brings to the cloister. You know how I became a religious—I whom everything drew to remain in the world. Now I have only to die for all to be accomplished. Would that, ere this actual death come, I could so die to myself as to live only in God and for Him! Then I shall realise the dream of my life: a happy death."

It is to the kindness of the Superioress of the same Convent of the Visitation at Bourg that we owe the following:—

"One of our sisters went to consult M. Vianney concerning her vocation. Before deciding anything the man of God enquired whether her family approved of her entering religion. On learning that she had an infirm mother he advised her strongly not to leave the old lady. Asked about a change of residence which, bringing them nearer to the church would enable them to attend more frequently, the holy Curé replied: 'No, no, it would be useless, quite useless.' And he repeated constantly, almost in a tone of entreaty: 'Ah! do not leave her; don't desert your poor mother!'

"Three months later this mother whom our sister had been advised not to leave died—and before the house which had been taken, in spite of the protests of her daughter, was ready for occupation.

"Another, who believed she was called to enter with the Ursulines at Trévoux, was advised by M. Vianney to come to Bourg. When she exposed her reasons for her choice the Curé of Ars spent a moment in recollection, then he said: 'It is useless, my child. A year hence these ladies will not be there.' This was in 1847, and a year later the Ursulines of Trévoux were dispersed.

"This outcome sufficed to inspire our dear sister with some faith, but not enough to render her docile. Almighty God permitted, as He often does, that she should feel an invincible aversion to the Visitation at Bourg. Various circumstances attracted her towards another convent of the same Order and she went there to make a retreat. She now felt a profound melancholy

which made her ill and induced ever-increasing disgust. Coming to Bourg to visit the church at Brou, she had the good fortune to meet a Jesuit Father who had been her confessor ; and he urged her to overcome her repugnance and follow the path God appeared to have traced out for her by the voice of the Curé of Ars. She came to the Visitation, to see a nun whom she knew, but only felt her repulsion revive with more force than ever. A few days after her family proposed to make a trip to Ars ; it was merely for pleasure, but they assisted at the catechism nevertheless. When it was over, our sister, to whom God had been speaking, declared she would not leave ; and as she seemed quite determined they left her free to remain.

“ She spent some hours in the church, importuning the assistants the while in order to obtain earlier access to M. Vianney, and praying God to solve her perplexities, when suddenly a person touched her on the shoulder and said : ‘ M. le Curé wishes you to come to him.’ Quite startled, she went to the confessional. ‘ Well ! my child,’ said M. Vianney, ‘ and so you are not at the Visitation at Bourg yet ? It is two years now since I told you to go there.’

“ How could the Curé of Ars have recognised a face which he had only seen from behind the grille ? How had he discerned her in the crowd ? How did he know she was in the church and waiting to see him ? How could he recall what he had said to her two years before ? All this is God’s secret.

“ M. Vianney now cut short all objections by : ‘ My child, make a retreat at Bourg ; then you can decide.’ Three days from that she was in our convent and found peace and happiness, which continue to this day.

“ One of our lay-sisters having come to Ars before taking the habit was summoned by M. Vianney, only a minute or two after entering the church, to her great astonishment and gratification. When she had explained why she came the holy Curé commenced to weep, and said : ‘ Go at once, my child, the good God has been long awaiting you !’ And indeed she had entered a religious house at the age of fifteen, but had left because her family had declined to pay her dowry. She had then taken to herself a companion ; and the two friends had promised never to separate. The day after her interview with M. Vianney she returned to Ars, being scrupulous about the breaking of her promise, which she had omitted to mention to the holy man. ‘ What ! my child, not gone yet ?’ said the Curé. ‘ Don’t be uneasy about your age. Go to the Visitation at Bourg ; tell the Reverend Mother that it is I who have sent you ; she can safely receive you, and will not be sorry for having done so.’

“ Our sister then explained her difficulty. ‘ Oh ! my child, only that ?’ replied he, immediately. ‘ Nothing to trouble your-

self about. In a week your companion will be called away to look after a sick brother ; you will separate naturally and the way will be clear.' All of which happened exactly as the Curé of Ars had foretold."

In a register at Ars kept by one of the missionaries we found the following, which bears witness to M. Vianney's gift of intuition:

" On 26th October, 1857, I presented myself to the venerable M. Vianney, who said without any previous confidence on my part : ' My child, you should become a Carthusian, because your soul is in peril if you remain in the world.' These were his own words, which he repeated three several times ; and I here declare that I have never repented of following his advice. I believe him to have been inspired by Him who delights to exalt the poor : *Et de stercore erigens pauperem*.

Brother ALPHONSE-MARIE, Carthusian."

Sister Marie-Victoire, the foundress of a *Providence* for young girls, was at Ars, at the commencement of her undertaking, with two companions, one of whom was her assistant. One morning, they had come to church to assist at M. Vianney's Mass before their departure. He approached the three and, addressing Sister Marie-Victoire, then a secular, said :—

" You must leave here at once !"

" But, Monsieur le Curé, we should wish to stay and hear Mass first."

" No, my daughter, go instantly ; one of you is about to be taken ill. If you delay you will be forced to stay here."

And in fact when they were only a short distance from home one of the three, who afterwards became Sister Marie-Françoise, found herself so indisposed that her two companions had to carry her the remaining distance. It was the early stages of a malady which could not possibly have been foreseen.

On another occasion these two young women, now become religious, made the pilgrimage to Ars. At the entrance of the village and before they had seen anyone at all they were met by an unknown female, who said : " M. le Curé has sent me to you ; he knows you are here and has assured me that you will receive me into your Institute." At the same moment another person arrived on the scene to offer them, on behalf of M. le Curé, a child for their *Providence*.

M. Toccanier told us that when he went to Hyères in 1860, a vicaire recognising him in the sacristy, asked him if he remembered having seen him (the vicaire) at Ars in company with the son of a rich and pious Christian from his own neighbourhood. " You should know," added he, " that the good Curé, on seeing the young man for the first time said to him with a smile : ' So you wish to become a Capuchin, my friend ? ' What a surprise

it was for that boy who for six years had cherished the idea in secret ; but had not dared to reveal it to his friends nor even to his confessor ! Well then ! to-day M. de L. is a Capuchin at Marseilles."

The superior of a congregation, who is personally known to us, was much discouraged by continual trials. He resolved to seek at Ars the counsels and strength necessary to enable him to face a situation that was daily becoming more intolerable. He begged the holy Curé to consult the good God in his interests, in order to ascertain whether he would not do better to resign his charge. M. Vianney promised to consider the matter during the Holy Sacrifice ; and when he had descended from the altar he said : " My friend, such is not the will of God." " But Monsieur le Curé, how do you know that ? " " I asked a sign, and one was given me. The good God does not wish you to abandon your functions. Let yourself be broken like a stone by the roadside."

A respected priest confided to us that, being assailed by terrible scruples of conscience, he had taken advantage of his stay at Ars to recommend the needs of his soul to the holy Curé. Having reassured him and promised his own prayers the servant of God took from his table a picture representing the Infant Jesus lying on straw and said, as he offered it to him : " Take it, my friend, this suits you." The sorely-tried priest saw in the picture a symbol of innocence, humility and poverty ; but its application to his own case was not so apparent. That evening he was alone with the Curé of Ars in his room and the conversation once again turned on direction. M. Vianney took some more pictures from the collection scattered about the table and suddenly, with the exclamation of one who has found what he wants, said : " Ah ! look, my friend, here is one which is perfect." It was an engraving by Letaille, in which our Lord is shown spreading His cloak to shelter a flock of sheep which had gathered close to the Good Shepherd. Now, in his struggles, the favourite custom of this good priest had been to invoke our Lord, to throw himself into His arms, to enter in spirit into the tabernacle and do violence to his Master by some of His own words : *Lord, save us, we perish ! Behold, he whom thou lovest is sick . . . Why hast thou forsaken me ?* This time the meaning was plain. But he had not said a word to his director of this practice or of his simple and naïve confidence in our Lord. What is quite certain is that from that moment a great peace reigned in his soul.

A notary had three daughters : the second was a religious and the third aspired to become one. This fresh sacrifice was too painful for the poor father. After many struggles he resolved to go to Ars to seek light from the holy Curé. The family presented themselves without being announced. He passed a moment in recollection, then turning to the elder of the two sisters he said :

"Mademoiselle, you ought to get married and comfort your father." Then, addressing himself to the younger: "You, Mademoiselle, should enter a convent." And as he saw the tears mount to the eyes of the father he continued: "You, Monsieur, you must accept your cross; if you bear it courageously it will carry you to heaven."

The superior of a newly-established community came to Ars to commend his work to the prayers of M. Vianney. The latter on seeing him greeted him by his name and, asking how his holy enterprise—which was very little known—was progressing entered into the matter in its minutest details. The superior was dumbfounded. "But how do you know me, Monsieur le Curé? This is the first occasion on which I have had the honour of seeing you." "The souls devoted to the service of the good God recognise one another everywhere," replied M. Vianney.

A Father of the Society of Jesus sent us the following:—

"In 1854 I gave a *triduum** to the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, at Avignon. Mademoiselle X. from the neighbourhood of Montpellier arrived, desiring to make a retreat under my direction. By the death of the last of her relations she had just become mistress of a considerable fortune. She had then to come to a decision, first about the question of her vocation and secondly concerning the disposal of her property. The former having been decided, only the details of the latter remained. Mademoiselle X. proposed to employ the greater part in the establishment or support of various good works, and wished to reserve only a very small fraction for herself. It was such a very delicate matter to advise upon that, in spite of her entreaties, I could not undertake the responsibility of giving an opinion. 'Well then!' said Mademoiselle X., with resolution in her tone, 'since I can get nothing from you, Father, I will go and consult the Curé of Ars.' 'An excellent idea,' replied I; 'do so without delay.' And a few hours later she took train and arrived at Ars, where she had never been before and knew no one. From the omnibus she repaired straight to the church and finding the chapel, in which was M. Vianney's confessional, crowded, took her place right in rear, in the chapel of St. Philomena and, consequently, she was unable to see M. Vianney, who was hearing confessions, or be seen by him. It was already late, nearly eight o'clock; and in the meantime M. Vianney left his post and came back at two in the morning, according to his custom, going out and coming in by the little side-door at the top of the church, and therefore not passing by the chapel of St. Philomena, where Mademoiselle X. still remained. It was while she was thus hidden in her corner that M. Vianney—

**Triduum*—a three-days' course of spiritual exercises, usually undertaken in religious communities, in preparation for some special occasion.

without doubt inspired from on high—in returning to his confessional, now as always, besieged by the crowd from the night before, and without stopping there, went straight to her, and touching her lightly on the shoulder from behind, said : ‘ *Mademoiselle*, you are pressed for time ; come, and I will talk to you first.’ The lady, who was of an imposing exterior, and being thirty-five or six could hardly be taken for a young person, was astonished at being addressed as *Mademoiselle*, but followed the good Curé to his confessional. There she had hardly commenced to expose the very complicated state of her temporal affairs, together with her projects of vocation and good works, when the man of God interrupted her with : ‘ Enough, my child, I understand it all. Dispose of your fortune in such and such a manner ; do this and that good work ; and make haste about it, for you have no time to lose.’ These decisions, so categorically given, pre-supposed a minute acquaintance with the means and position of *Mademoiselle X.*—information that the Curé had afforded *Mademoiselle X.* no time to give, and which he could not have acquired elsewhere. I ought to add that the decisions of the good Curé were wise in the highest degree ; and that having thoroughly examined the case myself I should not have advised differently. Happy at such a successful result of her visit, and at knowing the will of God, declared by the mouth of His servant, *Mademoiselle X.* left at once for Avignon. When she met me she said : ‘ Father, how did you contrive to inform the Curé of Ars so promptly as to the state of my affairs ? Your letter arrived before I did.’ The question amazed me. I explained that even though I had not been bound to secrecy concerning her affairs it would have been physically impossible for a letter to reach Ars in time for her interview with M. Vianney. We were both absolutely convinced that the holy man could not have been so well and so exactly informed otherwise than by supernatural means.

“ Such being the state of the matter, it was decided that *Mademoiselle X.* should leave immediately and dispose of everything in the manner decided upon at Ars. This she did, and a short time after reappeared at Avignon to say that her business was satisfactorily concluded, that she had provided against all eventualities and that nothing remained except to give herself entirely to God. The day after our interview, on her return home and after assisting at Mass, in which she received Holy Communion, she was struck down by a sudden attack of cholera. This proved immediately fatal, and thus on the point of realising the dream of her life on earth she was taken to join her Beloved in heaven.

“ These are the facts ; and the only reflection I have to make on them is that it is very difficult not to recognise the gift of scrutiny of hearts in this man of God.”

We have quoted instances which prove that the Curé of Ars

sometimes had a glimpse of the world invisible. Here are a few others that tend to support this opinion :—

The widow of a general officer who died without having time to make his confession said, at the close of an interview with the servant of God : “ This holy priest has reanimated my fortitude ; he has revived my hopes and mentioned things concerning my poor husband which only God and myself could possibly have known, and which have much consoled me.”

In talking to the des Garets family about one who was very dear to them and had recently been taken from this world by death, he exclaimed :

“ Ah ! she is very happy ! ”

“ She is in heaven then, Father ? ”

“ I did not say she is in heaven, but she is very near to it.”

He refused Masses which he was asked to celebrate for Made-moiselle Adèle de Murinais, saying : “ She is one of those souls who need no prayers.”

On other occasions the holy Curé seemed to see things at a distance by a species of second sight ; or pierce the veil of the future as if by the spirit of prophecy. For example :—

A young person was at Ars for retreat. At six o'clock in the morning the Curé perceiving her in the vestibule of the church, approached her, saying : “ My child, go back home at once ; you are wanted there.” As she had begun her confession to the missionary she told him what had just been said and asked with some anxiety what she was to do. She was advised to depart immediately and asked to write on her arrival. Some days later the poor child wrote to her director that a sister whom she had left in perfect health had died at four o'clock in the morning on which M. Vianney had told her to return home.

A lady who made the pilgrimage to Ars was asked by the Carmelites at Amiens to recommend a former superioress to the prayers of the servant of God. Her sight was failing her to such a degree that it was feared she might become altogether blind. “ No,” replied the holy Curé, peremptorily ; “ rest easy ; she will retain a certain amount of vision up to the last.” The good mother placed implicit faith in this prediction, which consoled her not a little and sustained her to the end of her long career. She died without any infirmity at the age of eighty-six.

A pilgrim came to ask the prayers of the man of God to obtain the cure of his servant. His surprise may be imagined when, having made his request, M. Vianney, who had never seen her, said : “ Yes, yes, my friend, it is Marie ; I see her in the choir.” The stranger rose and left the sacristy, saying to himself : “ Curious that he should know her name. On one point he is mistaken though ; she is at the bottom of the church where I left her.” But he was still more surprised to find his servant in the choir.

The missionary at Ars had an interview with this gentleman ; and asked if he would put what he had just said in writing. " Very willingly," replied he, and wrote a few lines in a register, certifying to the facts. This man had had a direct personal proof that there was something altogether extraordinary about M. Vianney and had been much startled at it. Was he converted ? Alas ! no. He only wanted his servant to see M. Vianney because *confession had a good moral effect on her*.

A native of Burgundy told the Curé of Ars that he often missed Vespers because his house was so far from the church. " A quarter-of-an-hour's walk is not much," remarked M. Vianney, with the assurance of one perfectly acquainted with the locality. This pilgrim was accompanied by his daughter, who evinced much impatience to get through her confession. " You ought to spend a fortnight here," observed the servant of God ; " you are not nearly so much pressed for time as you would have me believe." On this point also he was quite correct.

" In 1848 (relates a trustworthy witness), when there was a great effervescence of revolutionary passion, a mother who had a son at the College of the Minims, at Lyons, knowing that I was going to Ars, conceived the happy idea of getting me to ask the holy Curé whether the lad was incurring any risk. M. Vianney said No ; that he ought to be left at the college, where no harm would come to him. I took advantage of this interview to mention the anxiety of my own family, who, fearing that I should be exposed to danger in the country, had pressed me to rejoin them in town, which I could not make up my mind to do, on account of the daily alarms amid which existence was passed there. He advised me in the most positive manner to remain in the country, assuring me there was no risk for me. Later on I was a prey to much disquiet, and, to get rid of my trouble, spoke to him about the brothers whom I proposed to instal in my parish. Was there anything to fear ? Perhaps it might be more prudent to wait ? The house might be disestablished before it had well been founded. He reassured me once more, and told me all that was going to happen and, in fact, has happened. Much blood would flow ; but it would be for the most part in Paris and the great towns ; but that we villagers had nothing to fear.

" On the eve of the happenings of the year 1852, as I had finished my retreat at Ars, being depressed in spirit, I wanted to confide in him on the morning of my departure. He appeared to notice nothing but the expression of my fear, which he thought bore upon current events, and in his kindness he began to impart his previsions to me. But my thoughts were elsewhere and I listened without understanding then, when I came to myself, I stopped him by an unreflecting motion—which I have always regretted—remarking that this was not the subject of my disquiet. But I

have lived to see the accomplishment of most of the things that formed the matter of that interview."

A lady in the Convent of St. Clotilde, in Paris, who had a relation in the army of the Crimea, recommended him to the prayers of the Curé of Ars. His interest was besought on the same occasion in favour of a religious in the house, who was sick—this sister was only thirty. He replied: "The arms of the soldier will be successful. As to the religious, she will be more useful to her community in heaven than on earth."

Although the soldier had been in great danger he returned unharmed; the young religious died before the end of the month in which the reply was given.

During the war in Italy numerous wives, mothers and sisters came to consult the Curé of Ars about the safety of their loved ones exposed to the dangers of the battlefield. We recollect one young lady who feared for the life of her husband. Someone asked him: "What shall we say to this poor child, Monsieur le Curé?" "Tell her there is no cause for alarm and that peace will soon be restored." This was on 25th June. The negotiations at Villafranca commenced a few days later, as everyone knows. During the same murderous campaign we heard M. Vianney reassuring an anxious mother in the most positive tone. "Rest easy, my child! yes, most certainly you will see him again."

"In one of my numerous journeys to Ars," wrote Madame Raymond, whom we have quoted before, "I was asked to commend to the prayers of the good Father a lady of great merit on whom death seemed likely to inflict an irreparable loss. M. le Curé had never seen or even heard of the lady. 'My child,' said he, 'the little one is ripe for heaven. The good God asks for her. Do not hinder her on her way. Tell the mother of this little saint to submit; I will pray for her.' A fortnight after the poor mother sent one of her household to Ars to interrogate the holy Curé afresh. The reply was the same: 'She is ripe for eternity; don't let us keep her back.' A very short time after this second prediction that beautiful soul flew away to heaven."

A person wrote to the Missionary at Ars:—

"Mon Père,

"How grateful I am to you for having been my intermediary with the venerable Curé of Ars. Alas! the Holy Spirit inspired him, as always; and the blow I have just sustained is a new proof of it. The son, on whose behalf he vetoed my entrance into religion, has recently engaged in rash speculation on the Bourse and has lost the greater part of my property. Poor boy! if I had not been at hand to reanimate his courage, suicide would have ended all, and his soul, for which I have prayed these many years, have been lost for all eternity!"

A man from the neighbourhood of Rive-de-Gier had a small

property, for which he was offered an inconsiderable price. He came to ask M. Vianney what he ought to do. The holy Curé advised him not to sell it. Some time after the *Compagnie des mines de la Loire*, having explored the ground, discovered a rich lode there, for which they offered the proprietor an annual rental of two thousand francs. This man in his gratitude erected a statue of St. Philomena in his parish church.

An inspector of mines in the Loire district before accepting an advantageous offer made to him came to take counsel with the Curé of Ars. There was a question concerning a new shaft, the exploitation of which seemed to promise handsome profits. M. Vianney recommended him to refuse and he did so. Twelve days thereafter the water burst into the shaft and caused the death of several people.

Such infused lights should not appear to be out of place in the life of the Curé of Ars, since it is beyond all doubt, as Benedict XIV. instructs us, that God speaks familiarly to His servants and is accustomed to grant favours of this description to those whom He destines for great things in His Church. To the soul that has despoiled itself of all things earthly for His sake our Lord opens even here below the inexhaustible riches of heaven. At the same time this is the side of this wonderful life which, for us, must ever remain the most obscure ; for the humility of the Curé of Ars made him hide all these privileges, and the little that we know is only that which could not possibly be concealed from his entourage.

From what we have already said it is evident that the Curé of Ars had received from heaven the gift of tears—holy tears which reveal the presence in the heart of a treasury of graces and divine consolations. This blood of the soul, as St. Augustine terms it, flowed naturally from his eyes : a prayer without words, a tender and silent offering which associated him with the merits and sufferings of Jesus Christ and His saints. With those tears he washed the sins of those who came to kneel at his feet ; at the end of his life they had become continual.

As regards revelations, visions and sensible and extraordinary graces with which he had been favoured, here are all we have been able to discover :—

“ On 2nd November, 1856,” relates M. Toccanier, “ in speaking of the foundations he had recently made, M. le Curé owned to me in the presence of the Brothers of the Holy Family that during the night he tormented his good saints. ‘ You pray then during the night too, Monsieur le Curé ? ’ said I. ‘ That is when I am wakeful. I am old now and haven’t much longer to live ; I must make good use of every moment.’ ‘ You lie on the floor and don’t get much sleep ? ’ With an impressive air, he replied : ‘ *One is not always lying on the floor.*’ A moment or two after I said to him : ‘ Monsieur le Curé, it is evident from the establishment of

these foundations that the good God wills to show that He wishes you to be here ? ' *Quite otherwise,*' was the reply ; and, as if he repented of these partial confidences, he made haste to change the conversation.

" On 25th September, 1858, our good *Saint* admitted to me that on two occasions our Lord by a strong inspiration had given him to understand that the best use he could make of the funds at his disposal was in founding missions. He added : ' I value missions so greatly that I would die and sell my body afterwards if I could to establish a single one.' "

A trustworthy person who had been very deeply in the confidence of the servant of God confided the following to us the day after his death :—

" During a little visit I paid to M. le Curé on 3rd May, 1859, I spoke to him of my preference for those works that concern the salvation of souls, and of the objections people seemed to have in this matter. He agreed with me, and said : ' I was at some loss to know the will of God. St. Philomena appeared to me, descending from heaven all luminous and beautiful, surrounded by a white cloud. She said : " Thy works are good, because there is nothing more precious than the salvation of souls." ' While he spoke of this vision M. Vianney was standing before his fireplace with eyes raised to heaven and his countenance radiant at the mere recollection, which seemed to ravish him still. He had related this vision to Catherine at the time it occurred, only with less detail."

" By dint of continual questions," M. Toccanier told us, " I drew from M. le Curé the avowal that our Lord had given him miraculous signs to make him understand how pleasing his ministry was to Him. He recounted how during the night he had had a great shock. He had seen a person standing beside him who discoursed sweetly to him. ' It was not the *grappin*,' added he. ' The *grappin* has a shrill voice.' ' It was a holy apparition then ? ' said I. He changed the conversation abruptly, like one taken out of himself and fears he has said too much."

On another occasion he imparted to ourself with the utmost simplicity the following confidence. " About two months ago, not being able to sleep, I was sitting on my bed, weeping over my poor sins, when I heard a very sweet voice murmur in my ear : *In te, Domine, speravi, non confundar in æternum.* That encouraged me a little ; but as the trouble still persisted the same voice repeated more distinctly : *In te, Domine, speravi.*" " This time it was assuredly not the *grappin* who spoke to you like that." " It does not seem like it." " Did you see anything ? " " No, my friend." " Perhaps it was your guardian angel ? " " I know not."



Villand-Vernu, Phot., Ars (Ain).

Room in which M. Vianney died. (The bed, hangings, etc., are the same.)

CHAPTER L

DEATH AND FUNERAL OF M. VIANNEY

Grieved, without doubt, was the Church—not for his loss whom she mourned, but for her own, being ever desirous of once more possessing so excellent a master. Yet those whom his trials had saddened, could not but rejoice in his crown. On this day it is our privilege, not to fear, but to rejoice. (St. Augustine, *de S. Cypr.*, *serm.* 13.)

This man having accomplished all that God commanded him, God said to him : Since I have found thee just in my sight among all people, enter thou into my rest. (Roman Breviary, Off. Conf.)

For a long time past M. Vianney had seemed to be nothing more than a shadow ; and the feeble thread of voice that remained had become so attenuated that it was a constant strain to listen to him. All his energies appeared to be concentrated in his eyes, which shone like stars and suggested the visible outlets of the soul on fire within. It was strength in weakness ; life in death.

The terrible heat of July, 1859, had grievously tried the holy old man ; he had broken down several times. To enter the church at Ars superheated by the presence of an immense crowd was to experience the pangs of suffocation. Those awaiting their turn for confession were forced to go outside from time to time to get a breath of fresh air. But he never went out ; he never left his post of suffering ; nor would he hear of shortening the length of those deadly sittings in the confessional, which lasted from one o'clock in the morning until an hour before noon, and from one in the afternoon till eight at night—the whole time inhaling nothing but a burning, vitiated atmosphere, hardly capable of sustaining life. What wonder that he succumbed eventually to such a continuous martyrdom !

However, nothing seemed to foretoken his end, so accustomed had one become to rejoice in his presence, to believe in the perpetual miracle of his preservation, and so much care had he taken himself to conceal up to the last moment the increasing failure of nature's powers. It had indeed been noticed that on rising in the middle of the night to return to his dear sinners he had fallen several times from weakness in his room and on the stairs. But when we remarked that the hacking cough from which he had suffered for five-and-twenty years had now become more continuous and tearing, he only replied with a smile : “ Yes, it is annoying ! it takes up all my time ! ”

The Curé of Ars, then, had exhausted all his remaining strength in this supreme struggle of his declining years ; in this fight to the death with the infirmities of age ; he was close to the haven

where he would be. And now that death seemed about to get the upper hand the spoils of victory promised to be insignificant : a frame broken by work, maceration and vigils ; a system weakened by a slow and cruel immolation ; a body that looked like a spirit, so transparent did it appear.

His end was remarkable for nothing more than its astonishing simplicity. The servant of God wished to be as unassuming in his death as he had been in his life. Many had expected that in the supreme moment there would be transports of love, raptures, accents of fire and floods of holy tears ; but there was none of it all ! One would have said that he still desired to remain hidden, to envelop himself as much as possible in shadow and silence. He died as he would have wished to die, had the choice been offered him ; and death found him the same man as he had always been. Accustomed for years to live in a perpetual atmosphere of reverence and veneration he yet remained as calm, as simple, as tranquil as though he were alone, so completely had the supernatural and divine become naturalised in him.

A great Catholic writer has said that *man rarely wears himself out completely*, but our holy Curé did in fact accomplish this. He laboured on till he found himself bereft of strength and speech—well-nigh annihilated—but with the consciousness of faculties unimpaired up to the last and perfect serenity of spirit—a remarkable privilege, as those indeed could appreciate who knew to what a degree the fear of death and terror of God's judgments agitated that pure and generous soul.

It was in vain that we entreated him to take a little rest. His invariable reply was : " I will rest in heaven."

On 29th July he carried out his usual routine : gave his catechism, passed sixteen or seventeen hours in the confessional and finished this exhausting day with prayer. Returning home more broken and worn-out than he was wont to be, he sank upon a chair, saying : "*I can do no more !*" Already had he remarked : " Ah ! sinners will kill the sinner !" And again : " I know someone who will be finely taken in if there is no heaven !" Then he added : " I often think that, even if there were no other life, it would still be a great happiness to love God in this one, to serve Him and be able to do something for His glory."

What happened after the missionaries had withdrawn, in that chamber from which the holy priest was never to come forth alive, during that night which was the precursor of his four days' peaceful agony, will never be known. None had ever ventured to play the spy or try to penetrate the secrets of his sleepless nights, in which the powers of heaven and hell alike forgathered round his bed to console or afflict him.

All that is known is that at one o'clock in the morning when he tried to rise to go to the church weakness completely overcame him. He called and someone came.

"You are tired, Monsieur le Curé?"

"Yes, I think it is my *poor end*."

"I'll go and get help."

"No, don't disturb anyone; it's not worth while."

It is certain that M. le Curé by grace of that intuition of which we have said so much and which, in view of all the facts it is impossible to doubt, had foreseen and announced his approaching death. He had been presented with a beautiful riband to sustain the weight of the monstrance during the procession of the Blessed Sacrament, and had remarked: "I shall only use this once." And when the claim for his salary had been presented for his signature: "This will provide for the expenses of my funeral."

In May, 1859, at an evening sermon, to which the parishioners of Ars were specially invited, M. Vianney spoke to this effect:—

"When Moses felt himself about to die he assembled his people, reminded them of the many benefits God had conferred upon them, exhorted them to be grateful and faithful and showed them the promised land. Permit me to do the same, my brethren, and point out how much God has done for you! You have what very few parishes are so fortunate as to possess: you have the brothers to teach your boys and the sisters to train your girls; you have the missionaries to teach you the ways of God and conduct you to heaven. Be grateful for all this, then! Let your fidelity be your thanksgiving; because, if you have received so much, God will demand much of you."

The holy Curé then thanked his dear parishioners with much feeling for their generous donations to the fund then being raised to build a church to St. Philomena.

"Oh! my children," cried he, "what a beautiful thing you have just done! In fulfilling your Easter duties you have prepared a dwelling-place for the good God in your hearts and in building this fine church you are about to prepare another one! But the good God in His turn is also preparing a place for you in paradise.

"At one time it used to be myself in person who went to visit you and you have never refused me anything. I thank you for it. In these days it is M. le Missionaire who goes in my place; but I always go with him in spirit."

To many, these solemn words appeared to be the *Nunc dimittis* of the saintly old man. On all they left an impression of vague sadness and melancholy foreboding. They were in fact his last public address: one might have said that he had a presentiment and that God had revealed his hour to him.

When morning came the servant of God did not speak of celebrating Mass, and resigned himself to all those attentions which he had hitherto refused. However, he would not permit the use of a fan to give him a little fresh air and keep off the flies: "Let me be," said he, "*with my poor flies*."

"You are in great pain, Monsieur le Curé?" asked one. A resigned movement of the head was his only reply.

"Monsieur le Curé, we are trusting that St. Philomena, whom we are going to invoke with all our might, will cure you again, just as she did sixteen years ago."

"Oh! St. Philomena can do nothing now."

One can hardly imagine the consternation produced by the absence of M. le Curé when he was not seen to issue from his confessional at the usual hour. A profound grief spread from one to the other—more evident in some, more repressed in others; but particularly noticeable in those who had been more intimately connected with him.

Perhaps no man had ever drawn to himself such warm sympathy and such sincere and lasting devotion as the Curé of Ars. Not to mention the diocesan missionaries; the Brothers of the Holy Family, who seemed to have been sent to Ars by divine Providence on purpose to lighten the crushing burden of the holy priest by a thousand small services, always discreetly veiled; nor the excellent Brother Jérôme, behind whom we always seemed to see the image of the good *Saint*; we have seen strangers come to Ars one after the other—originally attracted by the fame of the servant of God and happy to pass some time in his vicinity; then, fascinated by the inexplicable charm of which we have spoken, they attached themselves to his person, mounting guard over his confessional, saving him as much as possible from the importunity of the multitude, rescuing him when he threatened to be overwhelmed, checking disorder and preventing obstruction; thinking of nothing but how to render his life less insupportable.

Gratitude inspires us to make mention here of the services of MM. de La Bâtié, Oriol, Julien, Viret, Teibre and Pagès. This last it was who, during the whole period that the illness of the Curé of Ars continued, took up his station on the roof of the presbytery under the full heat of the August sun and watered the roof and walls continuously, in order to maintain a refreshing coolness within. There was also that grand Christian, whose virtues rendered him worthy to be Maire of the village of which M. Vianney was Curé and who, as might have been expected from a friend of thirty years, watched by his pillow without intermission until the end.

For three whole days every device that the most ingenious piety could suggest was put in operation to move heaven: prayers to every saint in paradise, entreaties for prayers from all religious communities, pilgrimages to every shrine; but the intention of God to crown His great servant became hourly more apparent.

On Tuesday evening he asked for the Last Sacraments. Divine Providence had brought hither priests from most distant dioceses to be witnesses of the ceremony. The entire parish assisted at

it. One who had the right to approach the sick man knelt and with clasped hands besought him even now to pray to our Lord for his own recovery. He fixed his brilliant gaze on her and without a word signed that it was impossible. He was seen to weep when the sound of the bell announced the last visit of the Master whom he had so fervently adored. Some hours later his tears flowed afresh; they were the last, tears of joy, for they fell on the cross of his Bishop. Mgr. de Langalerie, warned by urgent messages of the serious state of affairs, had made haste to come and now, breathless and grief-stricken, forced his way through the kneeling crowd in the square. He was just in time, for at two in the morning after his arrival, Jean-Baptiste-Marie Vianney passed peacefully away—without agony or struggle, and while the priest who writes these lines was reciting the prayer: *May the holy angels of God come to meet him and conduct him into the holy city Jerusalem.*

Hardly had the venerable Curé of Ars surrendered his saintly soul to God in our arms and those of the faithful companion of his labours, M. l'abbé Toccanier, in the presence of M. le Comte des Garets, Maire of Ars, the Brothers of the Holy Family, and a few other persons who had been more closely attached to the holy man, than the entire village hastened to the presbytery—from the church, where a multitude knelt in prayer; from every house, in which grief and anxiety had kept the inhabitants awake throughout the night. They could hardly realise their misfortune; they had counted on a miracle, being fully persuaded that one would take place, as had happened in equally critical circumstances sixteen years before. This exceptional existence had always appeared to be so entirely independent of all ordinary conditions. The *Saint* had lived in a manner that would have been fatal to any other, and that for three-and-forty years.

And the people from elsewhere, what need had they not of him! The enormous influx of pilgrims, arriving without intermission from the ends of the earth, sick in body or soul, sinful, afflicted—never would he complete the tale, never more would his lips pronounce the parting word of consolation, nor his hand be lifted in final absolution! Almighty God it seemed had called away his servant before all who suffered had been relieved, all who wept consoled, all who had strayed restored to the right way; before the lost sheep had been returned to the fold, before the task confided to the successor of St. John Francis Regis, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Pierre Fourier and Blessed Grignon de Montfort* had been fully accomplished.

*St. Pierre Fourier, known as *Le bon Père de Mattaincourt*, of which place he was appointed Curé in 1597. Canonised by Leo XIII. in 1897. Blessed Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort, 1673-1716, missionary in Brittany and Vendée. Beatified by Leo XIII., in 1888.

We had always lived in confidence that he would still be spared to us for many years. Ars without her Curé would be Ars no longer, without her church always open and always full, without the *Angelus* sounding in the middle of the night, without the beleaguered confessional, without the good *Saint* who was the sun of this privileged corner of earth, shedding upon it the light and warmth of his virtues. And now he was among us no longer ! He had blessed us for the last time ; he had bidden us a last farewell !

The Curé of Ars was dead ! He had ended his life of prayer and devotion, of charity and patience, of humility and sacrifice. He had fought the good fight, finished his course and had gone to receive his crown of justice. And now had come rest ; he had become a *rentier* (" gentleman at large "), as he had called it, in the heavenly kingdom.

Meanwhile the priests made haste to vest the deceased in the humble surplice in which they had become accustomed to see him, and which he had hardly ever laid aside. Already had his body been washed with reverent care—care such as is bestowed on a sacred relic. It has always been a matter of thanks to God on our part that we, in company with our colleague the Abbé Descôtes, should have been chosen for this duty. A brother of the Paris house of St. John of God begged and obtained the favour of being permitted to shave the beloved and venerated face of the departed. One of the lower rooms was hastily adorned with white hangings, flowers and crowns, and the body having been transported thither, from dawn of that day and for the two succeeding days and nights without cessation was visited by a multitude which constantly augmented as the sorrowful news spread farther and wider through France.

Considerable care had to be exercised for the safe custody of any article that had belonged to the servant of God—a very necessary precaution, for, had the aspirations of the crowd who thronged the presbytery been satisfied, there would hardly have been a stone of the building itself left. As it was and in spite of the utmost vigilance there was a certain amount of pious larceny, which veneration may explain but can hardly justify. In all other respects, however, the utmost order prevailed.

Every two hours the passing-bell tolled, adding its quota to the universal chorus of lamentation and exciting a recrudescence of prayers in the church and a renewed outburst of grief in the room where the body was exposed. And from the neighbouring villages came the sound of the bells of their churches tolling in sympathy with the bereavement of the parish of Ars.

Two Brothers of the Holy Family kept constant watch by the bier of the departed, which had to be protected by a strong barrier ; and their arms were wearied out in acceding to the

demands of the faithful by presenting to the hands of him who when alive had never raised them but to bless, the objects of piety which they brought for the purpose. These were countless : indeed the shops of the village, numerous as they were, were entirely denuded of crosses, rosaries, books, pictures, and such like articles.

Despite the excessive heat, the body exhibited no sign of decomposition and thus was able to be kept uncovered until the evening before the funeral. The servant of God appeared but to sleep. The features preserved their habitual expression of calm and benevolence : if anything, perhaps, a species of luminous transformation might be said to have come over them.

On Saturday at the appointed time and Mgr. de Langalerie having arrived, the funeral procession was organised.

Ever since the dawn of day dense masses of people had flowed into Ars by every road. The village was filled with strangers, whose number the most moderate estimate placed at six thousand. More than three hundred priests had arrived from the dioceses of Belley, Lyons, Grenoble, Saint-Claude and Autun, while the fact of its being Saturday had kept many others in their parishes. Nearly all the convents of the surrounding country were represented. The Dominicans of Lyons had sent their Prior. Père Hermann—one of the men on whom the holy Curé had made the most lively impression—happened to be within reach of Ars and was among those present.

The pall-bearers were M. le Curé of Trévoux, Canon of the cathedral of Belley, M. le Comte des Garets, Maire of Ars and M. le Sous-préfet of the district. The chief-mourners were the missionaries of Pont-d'Ain, the spiritual family of the holy Curé and his relations from Dardilly.

Up to the starting point all proceeded in the most perfect order. The women and children of the parish, confraternities, members of religious communities, clergy, both secular and regular, ranged themselves in two lines. But hardly had the coffin left the house than there occurred one of those spontaneous and irresistible movements which had always taken place whenever the servant of God appeared during life. It being wholly impossible to control the crowd, the body of their beloved pastor was thus escorted in triumphal procession round the village.

No traveller arriving at Ars would ever have thought that he was assisting at a funeral. It may be doubted whether any living prince or emperor could have excited such a universal and sincere expression of regard as that which accompanied the mortal remains of this poor priest to their last resting-place.

Arrived in the square in front of the church, the vast assemblage halted. Here it was that the Bishop of Belley had decided to speak and declare to his people that their Curé had been *the*

good and faithful servant who had entered into the joy of his Master.

His discourse proceeded as follows :

“ ‘ Well done, good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy lord.’ (Matt. xxv., 21).

“ Keep silence, my brethren ! Listen attentively, pious and faithful souls whom respect, affection and grief have drawn hither in such numbers to this imposing ceremony . I am about to recall to your minds the words of our Lord in the holy Gospel : and is there one among you who did not feel as if he heard them from the mouth of God Himself at the moment when the blessed soul of our saintly Curé was at length released from that body worn out by so many years’ service of the divine Master ? *Euge, serve bone et fidelis ; intra in gaudium Domini tui* (Courage ! good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.)

“ Let us meditate, my brethren, for a few moments on those sweet and cheering words. We should find in them at this moment our hope and our consolation. I may add that they contain a salutary warning, as from the lips of one who will never speak to you again otherwise than by the example of his life and probably also by the miracles at his tomb.

“ *Euge !* Courage ! We feel re-animated by the mere mention of the word : Courage ! good and faithful servant ! Jean-Baptiste-Marie Vianney, our holy Curé of Ars, was a servant of God who numbered seventy-four years of good and loyal service—his lifetime was the measure of his devotion. As a child he served God ; as a youth he served God ; as an ecclesiastical student he served God. No failure ever diverted him from his project of serving God in the most complete and efficient manner by embracing the sacerdotal state. He only wished to be a priest in order to serve God. And he has thoroughly proved it ! priest-vicaire, curé, he has ever served God.

“ This service, you must understand, ended by becoming so entirely identified with his life that the ordinary actions of everyday life which we perform and consecrate to the service of God by offering them to Him, thus indirectly contributing to His glory, had completely disappeared from the life of the holy Curé. That he never ate or slept was almost literally true in the case of the Curé of Ars. Three or four ounces of food daily and an hour or two of sleep sufficed him. And the rest of his time, how did he occupy it ? Entirely in the service of God and that of souls : fourteen, sixteen, eighteen hours a day, according to the season, devoted to the confessional, interrupted only by those catechisms which formed such eloquent sermons in themselves. Even when he could not be heard, even when he could not be understood, the very sight of him preached, moved and converted. And the time that still remained to him, what use did he make of it ? In intercourse with his beloved parishioners, in visits to the

sick, in prayer—prolonged prayer—and pious reading. In a word, his whole day was employed in works directly tending to the service and glory of God. And this day entirely devoted to God, repeated itself, Sunday and week-day, day and night, without cessation or relaxation.

“Euge! serve bone et fidelis, quia in pauca fuisti fidelis! Courage! good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful in little things! O my God, may it be permitted me to say it, but it was not in little things alone that the Curé of Ars has been a good and faithful servant! I say it to Thy glory, O my God; for this life has been a marvel of Thy love and power; for Thee, undoubtedly a small matter, an infinitesimal matter; but for us poor mortals a marvel, this life of the Curé of Ars—a continual miracle. How many years, how many centuries perhaps, since the like spectacle has been witnessed—a priestly career passed amid like conditions, so fruitfully, in such sanctity, and so continuously occupied and spent in the service of God.

“And this service of God has been accomplished with all the conditions of perfection and fidelity that the sanctity of the Master whom we serve demands. *Euge! serve bone et fidelis!* Courage! good and faithful servant! Good in a Christian, in a priest, signifies sacrifice, the Cross, mortification; good is the lament of nature changed into the sigh of expiation and love. Sacrifice is an act of love and at the same time a veritable proof of a veritable love. That is what constitutes *good* service: the service of supreme trial; and our saintly Curé of Ars showed this solid and persevering goodness.

“To the austerity of a life such as I have described and of which you have all been witnesses he added numerous mortifications; he had to bear almost continual suffering; and Almighty God laid upon him from time to time the burden of secret and mysterious trials.

“And this service, at once so painful and so *good*, was also *faithful*. The fidelity of this servant was so complete that self-love never induced him to turn aside. What he did for God the holy priest left entirely to God. This poor country curé, surrounded by thousands of pilgrims, was yet simple as a child. You have seen him—all you who are here present—you have heard him: is it not the truth, the exact truth? The most numerous and varied manifestations of admiration and reverence never appeared to influence him in any way. He blessed the multitude as one who had himself received the benediction of One greater than he. He saw his portrait exhibited everywhere and in every variety of style as that of the patron-saint of the neighbourhood and on these occasions would make some trivial observation which his simplicity rendered sublime. *Euge! serve bone et fidelis!* how true are these sacred words in your case! Courage!

good and faithful servant ! But no ; I speak not for you ; I speak for us who remain : Courage ! *Let us weep not as those who have no hope.* Ah ! hope here is almost faith. Suffer me now, my brethren, to open my innermost heart more fully to you.

“ Having been providentially warned of the rapid progress of the malady of our dear and venerated Curé of Ars, we hastened hither, reciting our prayers on the way. It was the Office of St. Dominic, another good and faithful servant. And in spite of ourself the words of the Office reminded us unceasingly of the holy priest we were on our way to see. In union with Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, we love when we recite the breviary to think of the Saint whose festival we celebrate. St. Dominic had only half our prayers, for at every moment we saw in spirit the good and saintly Curé of Ars as well. For instance, we said : *Domine, quis habitabit, etc., Lord, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle ? or who shall rest in thy holy hill ? He that walketh without blemish, and worketh justice.* These words described him so perfectly ! And then : *Domine, Dominus noster : O Lord, our Lord, how admirable is thy name in the whole earth ! . . . What is man that thou art mindful of him ? . . . thou hast crowned him with glory and honour.* These and a thousand other passages seemed to apply so well to the servant of God.

“ And a few hours after the death of the holy priest, when we said Mass for him at the altar to which he has so often ascended himself, the thoughts of the previous evening recurred to our mind in reading the words that follow the epistle : *Emitte lucem tuam : Thy light and thy truth have led me to thy holy mountain and to thy tabernacle . . . Why, then art thou sorrowful, O my soul ? and why dost thou disquiet me ?* And those others of the Gospel : *Levate oculos vestros : Lift up your eyes and behold the fields white for the harvest.* These fields, as it seemed to us, were the congregations in whose midst our holy Curé laboured ; and we beheld them yielding their rich and abundant fruits ; and our heart overflowed, as it does still, with confidence and holy hope.

“ *Euge, serve bone.* Courage ! good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. The hope these words inspire as applied to the holy Curé of Ars is itself a consolation in the solemn and mournful circumstances that have called us here ; nevertheless, by a fresh and attentive study of the sense of these sacred words we shall discover a more direct and abundant source of consolation wherewith to mitigate the rigours of the sacrifice imposed upon us by God. And this sacrifice is great indeed ! We have all lost very much ; for the Curé of Ars is one who cannot be replaced ! God Himself, even for His own glory, will not multiply such prodigies of grace and sanctity among us. All France has lost a priest who was an honour to her, and one to whom her children came from every part for counsel. Poor

sinner! what have they not lost in losing the Curé of Ars? They have lost the irresistible voice and the still more moving tears that were wont to bring them to repentance in spite of themselves. Our diocese has lost heavily. The Curé of Ars was at once its glory and its providence, for was he not the founder of the missions that were so near his heart? More than ninety parishes will owe to him the blessing of a mission every ten years in perpetuity. And how many other good works has he not blessed, encouraged, assisted!

"Your Bishop, too, has suffered a terrible bereavement; he has lost a friend, a father, an example! Poor holy Curé! how he trembled that first time we met him! Mgr. Devie and Mgr. Chalandon were so kind; and they had always been so particularly kind to him! The arrival of a new bishop is always a matter of some little anxiety, and he had so deep a reverence for the episcopal dignity. How often at the first tidings of our arrival has he not hastened to meet us on this very spot—always insisting on falling on both knees to ask our benediction, despite the murmurs that would sometimes escape a crowd, astonished that such exalted sanctity should bend before the simple representative of ecclesiastical authority. But this first sentiment of fear speedily vanished when he came to know us; and we are assured that he eventually had the same love for ourself as we felt towards him.

"Yes, I repeat, we have all lost much; but those words: *Euge! intra in gaudium!* Courage! enter thou into joy! occur to our minds most opportunely to stay, if not our tears, at least our complaints, our murmurings, our excessive regrets. Courage! good servant, enter into the joy of your Master; that is to say: Good and faithful labourer, your life's work is done; you have toiled long enough and accomplished sufficient; now behold the recompence of all your devotedness. And such indeed was the reflection that suggested itself when, after having blessed the saintly patient and prayed with and for him, we were literally borne by the tearful multitude to the foot of the altar. There we assisted at the public prayers, and as we listened to the voice of one of his beloved sons, one of our missionaries, entreating a miracle even then in the restoration to health and strength of that venerated father; in spite of ourself, we felt totally incapable of associating ourself with that prayer, being content to leave all in the hands of God and submitting to His holy will. Though we said he has done enough, he himself would doubtless say, as did St. Martin to his weeping disciples: *Non recuso laborem*, I do not refuse to labour still. He, so good, so kind, so moved by our grief, would have consented to live and labour yet more; but could we have asked it? He was broken, worn out, and only appeared to be sustained by a miracle. Has not God spared him

to us long enough already? We may need him, but he has need of rest, he has a right to his reward. May he enter then, may he have already entered, into the joy of his God: *Intra in gaudium Domini tui!*

"Besides, think you that he will be so completely absorbed by the joys of paradise as to forget us, to fail to pray for and serve us? After all, heaven is very near to earth, since it is God that unites them both. Courage then! Courage! in his resting-place in the bosom of God the Curé of Ars is not entirely lost to us. And thus may we draw renewed hope from his tomb and the words which we would wish to see inscribed upon it; a hope that as a first benefit the saintly Curé of Ars may obtain fresh graces for our souls.

"What would the holy Curé have said if during his lifetime we had ventured to apply to him the expressions we have just made use of in respect to him; Courage! good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Master? Would you believe, dearly-beloved? and ought we to tell you? Yes, certainly; and we pray, by the memory of him we have lost, that our words may be worthy of the occasion.

"Not only would our good and holy Curé have responded in the words of the Gospel: I am but an unprofitable servant, why call me good and faithful? but he would have desired—may we say, have been tempted—to say much more severe things concerning himself. This was one of the hidden trials to which I alluded before and by which Almighty God proved His servant. 'Monsieur le Curé,' said one of his missionaries one day, 'how can you resist the temptation to vain-glory in the midst of this ever-changing crowd?' 'Ah! my child,' replied the holy priest, 'ask rather how I contrive to resist the temptation to fear, discouragement and despair.' A truly marvellous extreme of the grace of God and one which explains the persistent desire of the venerated pastor to abandon his parish in order to pass the rest of his life in retirement and penance: 'Ah! Monseigneur,' he said to us, only a fortnight ago, 'I shall soon ask permission to retire in order that I may weep over the sins of my life.' 'But, my good Curé,' we replied, 'the tears of the sinners God sends to you are of infinitely greater value than your own.' 'Don't speak to me like that, or I shall not come to see you any more.' Nor would he be convinced by all our expressions of encouragement and affection.

"In his own eyes he was nothing but a poor sinner, his pastoral charge affrighted him, he feared he had acquitted himself of it badly and the judgments of God made him tremble at every moment. The last days of his life were passed in profound calm; without doubt the divine voice had whispered: Courage! but during his previous illness, some sixteen years ago—in which it

pleased God to permit him to experience the pains of death in some sort, that your prayers might receive a striking and consoling answer—the perplexities of his soul were very noticeable. And what a lesson should this revelation of the innermost state of the good Curé be to us !

“ Ye timorous souls, so numerous perhaps in this pilgrimage of Ars, and you that are over-fearful, learn from the holy Curé to overcome your fears and find in obedience a remedy for them. The temptation was for him the *ne magnitudo revelationum extollat** of St. Paul. By these terrors God preserved the humility of his soul ; they gave more merit to that feeling of confidence which, after all, was the prevailing feature of his life ; they inspired his words, those words which have worked so much good among you, with the spirit of compassion and fellow-feeling. And if you ask what was the secret of his immense power to console I answer that it was the good odour of his prayers and tears, in a word of all the graces God poured upon this wound of his heart, which was, and perhaps still is, your own.

“ But above all, ye indifferent souls, ye presumptuous souls—souls very rare in this pious assembly, but at present drawn hither from the distractions of the world outside by the report of this remarkable and touching spectacle—take well to heart the fact that the Curé of Ars, the saintly Curé of Ars, walked every moment in dread of the judgments of God. What an example to a world that fears so little, or fears not at all, the void being filled, not by love but by spiritual torpor, indifference and forgetfulness. Oh ! when will you awake ; you who have so much cause to fear, when will you fear ? When will you take seriously the most serious of all affairs ?

“ For you, dear and venerated Curé, temptation is over, there is no longer any place for fear. We have entire confidence that you have already entered upon joy, rest and peace. *Intra in gaudium Domini tui !* You have been introduced by that Mother of Mercy whom you loved so much ; by your patron John the Baptist, that Saint so humble and so great ; by St. Philomena, your patroness by adoption, who seemed to live once again in you and to hide her name under yours, as you hid your own behind hers.

“ And from your abode of happiness and glory watch over us who still remain ; bequeath to us your two-fold spirit of devotion in the service of God and holy fear tempered by confidence and love. Leave it to this community of missionaries, whose glory it will ever be to have had a spiritual father in you. Leave it to your much-loved parishioners of Ars, who only console themselves for your absence from their midst by an unceasing and faithful

* And lest the greatness of the revelations should exalt me . . . (II. Cor. xii., 7.)

remembrance of you. And leave it to the clergy of this diocese, who are justly proud to have numbered you among their members. And finally, leave it to the Bishop, so grieved and yet so happy to be able to speak thus of you at this moment. And believe that the best and most-wished-for day of his whole episcopate will be that on which the infallible voice of the Church permits him to solemnly intone in your honour the words: *Euge, serve bone et fidelis intra in gaudium Domini tui ! Amen.*"

The discourse of Mgr. de Langalerie was followed by solemn High Mass. Though the church had been twenty times as large, it would not have contained the multitude that thronged to its portals ; so a company of gendarmes mounted guard and restricted admission to the clergy, the civic authorities and the family of the deceased. During the celebration of the Holy Mysteries profound recollection and silence reigned in the square and at the moment of the Consecration all fell devoutly on their knees.

The last Absolution having been given by the Bishop, the remains of the holy priest were borne to the chapel of St. John the Baptist. It was here that his life's work had been mainly accomplished ; and it was fitting that his body should be laid to rest by the side of the confessional from which he had dispensed with so unsparing a hand the treasures of the divine mercy.

Had curiosity impelled some mere casual spectator of this remarkable scene to inquire into the composition of this weeping crowd he would have found that all classes of society were represented at the graveside—ancient and noble families, military officers, functionaries of all sorts, men of position and men of letters. These with one accord united with the simple peasants of the neighbourhood in paying a last tribute of respect and admiration to whom ? To Jean-Baptiste-Marie Vianney, a poor country curé, whose sole title to their veneration was that he was a priest ; that he had well understood the duties of a priest and had heroically carried them out. In its innermost depths the human heart is not so hard as is sometimes supposed, and when the truly good and beautiful are presented to its gaze can still be moved. It has been well said that sanctity is not only a power in the world, but the chief power. And the France of the nineteenth century may yet become once more the France of St. Louis, St. Bernard and St. Dominic. And all that is necessary for that is that God should raise up saints to live and die among her people.

CHAPTER LI (SUPPLEMENTARY)

BEATIFICATION OF THE CURÉ OF ARS

THE pomp and circumstance attending the obsequies of the Curé of Ars reflected in a very striking manner the veneration in which he was universally held. But in the eyes of the multitude they were nothing but the presage of a ceremony far more magnificent, in honour of him whom they delighted to call their *Saint*. Nor did they wait in vain. "This priest, poor, humble and unlearned in the eyes of the world, has become the marvel of the entire human race." In these words of Pius X. may be found the complete explanation of the sanctity of the Curé of Ars, the sole reason for his beatification, and the entire lesson of his life.

And when the Pope, in his allocution to the priests of Paris assembled at the Vatican, held up Jean-Baptiste-Marie Vianney as the exemplar of the sacerdotal state, he did but explain and emphasise the significance of the honours rendered by Holy Church to the virtues of this great servant of God. "The glorification of the Blessed Jean-Baptiste-Marie Vianney is an event remarkable among all those permitted by divine Providence in our times ; in order that every curé in the world, while venerating in him a new protector, may reflect upon the virtues of his life and, if he would carry out in all its perfection that highest and noblest of all duties, the care of souls, endeavour to reproduce them in his own life."

Poor, humble, unlearned in the eyes of the world. Such then is the ideal of the priestly life suggested to us by the magnificent solemnities held at Rome, on 8th January, 1905. And in practice canonisations do not happen by chance, but at the opportune moment. They convey, each one, an instruction suitable to the present time. They are in fact the lesson of the day.

And just as dogmatic definitions have ever been the correction of errors by which it has been attempted to corrupt the faith, so the glorification of saints is a corrective to the aberrations of human nature and the enfeeblement of the Christian life.

At the time when the refinements of luxury and material enjoyment had pervaded every class of society Holy Church placed upon her altars a layman, Benedict Joseph Labre, whose leading characteristic on earth was his absolute and heroic contempt of all worldly comforts and conveniences.

To-day love of money, desire for honours, reliance on human

learning threaten to obscure, in the minds of the clergy, the idea of religious truth and undermine the spirit of the Gospel. So the Church holds up for the admiration and imitation of priests a priest who was before everything *poor, humble and unlearned in the eyes of the world.*

Every canonisation of a saint is the glorification of some page of the Gospel, because every saint is the living realisation of one of Christ's lessons. And divine Providence, in bringing about these solemnities at the opportune moment, disposes things in such fashion that to each error, each aberration of society, there should be an appropriate reply in some magnificent example which shall give the lie to the error and correct the aberration.

The Blessed Curé of Ars is the very antithesis of modern times.

If there is one power more indisputable than another in our day it is assuredly that of money. And yet this priest, clad in the tatters of an old soutane and subsisting on a single boiled potato per diem, whose maxim was *to give everything and keep nothing*, is seen exercising an unexampled power over his contemporaries for over a quarter-of-a-century.

None ever doubt but that the prestige of rank and the assertion of worldly greatness are the conditions indispensable to all authority and influence. And yet this humble country Curé who never thought of himself and only aspired to be unknown and forgotten, who despised himself and courted the contempt of others, has beheld persons innumerable from every land at his feet to ask his absolution, and the most eminent members of a society, at once ambitious and proud, on their knees to receive direction from him as from one whose decisions admitted of no appeal.

The fetish of modern times is unquestionably science—in the widest acceptance of the term. It is from science that religion is to receive her quietus, and when science has spoken her last word nothing will remain for religion but to die in peace—at least, so they tell us. And yet this priest, whose studies had only been intermittent and incomplete—deficient in philosophy and theology, destitute of all literary, historical and scientific acquirements—has instructed and guided with a master hand the subtlest intelligence and most erudite brains.

The life of the Curé of Ars is a demonstration, clear and irrefutable, of the futility of money, the impotence of earthly greatness and the emptiness of human learning. From his obscure village have come object-lessons on the Gospel and the teaching of St. Paul, anent the vanity and sterility of worldly wisdom as contrasted with the mysterious and all-powerful graces given by God.

The humble Curé was wont to say, as did St. Peter : *Silver and gold I have none ; but what I have, I give thee : In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise and walk.* And at his word suffering

vanished and the paralysed body and mind recovered their power of movement.

Again, our divine Lord taught His disciples : *Whosoever will be greater, shall be your minister. And whosoever will be the first among you, shall be the servant of all.* Wherefore, faithful to this doctrine, the poor Curé of Ars, annihilating himself before others and in his own eyes, became the greatest of all and a power among those with whom he had to deal.

The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God, said St. Paul : *And my speech and my preaching was not in the persuasive words of human wisdom, but in shewing of the spirit and power.* And thus preached this priest of little learning, who spoke in a provincial patois which, on his lips, became a most admirable instrument of conversion, overcoming hesitation, resolving doubt, confounding incredulity and transforming hearts. From that remote pulpit issued discourses that entranced multitudes ; and in presence of their dominating authority the most illustrious orator of the nineteenth century, Lacordaire, laid aside his own eloquence to listen in humility and silence.

The tale is told ; and the imposing solemnities of 8th January, 1905, held in St. Peter's at Rome, did but remind the Christian world of this spectacle of a truly sacerdotal life and a priestly mission, well understood and perfectly carried out. On that day pilgrims from every nation assembled in the magnificently adorned basilica to chant the *Te Deum* before the picture of the poor Curé of Ars, encircled with glory and ascending to heaven. The entire Catholic world, and especially that of France, had long been eagerly awaiting this glorification of one of the greatest of her sons.

It was only a few years after the death of the Curé of Ars that the report of the miracles wrought at his tomb decided the Sovereign Pontiff Pius IX. to commence the process for his beatification. This was in 1862. Ten years later the decree introducing the cause was signed, and on 3rd October, 1874, Jean-Baptiste-Marie Vianney was proclaimed Venerable.

The final meeting of the Congregation charged with examining the heroicity of the virtues of the Curé of Ars took place on 21st June, 1896, under the presidency of Leo XIII. himself. The favourable report of Cardinal Parocchi was unanimously adopted ; and on 1st August, Leo XIII. promulgated the decree attesting the heroicity of the virtues of the Venerable Vianney, in which his ardent piety, fruitful apostolate, profound humility and unwearied charity were most eloquently portrayed.

Hardly had he been elevated to the pontifical dignity than Pius X.—who had himself been the simple curé of a humble parish—set about the completion of the work inaugurated by his predecessors. On 21st February, 1904, he published the decree establishing the authenticity of the miracles attributed to the intercession of the Curé of Ars.

"We know not how," said the Sovereign Pontiff, "to express the joy that fills Our heart in promulgating the solemn decree officially attesting the authenticity of the miracles obtained at the intercession of the Venerable Jean-Baptiste Vianney, which have been put forward in support of his beatification. In very truth, We are unable to express Ourselves adequately. Indeed, nothing more agreeable, nothing more profitable could happen—not only for Ourselves, who for so many years willingly laboured in the parochial ministry; but also for every curé throughout the Catholic world—than to see this venerable Curé invested with the honours of the Blessed; the more so that his glory will be reflected on all who are consecrated to the ministry of souls. May God grant that every curé, without exception, may take the Venerable Vianney as his model; and learn in his school that admirable piety towards Almighty God; the silent eloquence of which fascinates and allures souls in a manner that no outpouring of words, no abundance of sermons can ever accomplish. May the curés keep Jean-Baptiste Vianney constantly before their eyes; and may the charity that prepares the soul and renders it prompt to despise even life itself be reproduced in them."

The process of the beatification of the Curé of Ars was brought to a close by the ceremony in St. Peter's of 8th January, 1905. It was a festival never to be forgotten by those who had the privilege of being present. A wave of emotion swept over the assemblage when, after the reading of the Brief of Beatification, the veil concealing the picture of the Blessed Curé was withdrawn, and all could contemplate above the throne of St. Peter the apotheosis of Jean-Baptiste-Marie Vianney, vested in the humble soutane of a country curé and borne upwards on the clouds of heaven. Banners whereon were set forth the miracles of Blessed Vianney explained the reason of the present honours rendered to him; while, round the principal door, were placed tablets describing the sanctity of his life. Near the entrance to the basilica was a painting, showing the holy Curé himself surrounded by his parishioners, before the humble church which had been the scene of his marvellous apostolate. At the foot of this representation appeared the name, henceforth and for all time immortal in the heroic annals of the Church, thus:

VENERABILIS DEI SERVUS
JOANNES MARIA VIANNEY
PAROCHUS VICI ARS IN GALLIA

(The Venerable Servant of God, Jean-Marie Vianney, Curé of the village of Ars, in France).

Desirous of adding a personal tribute to that which the Christian world rendered to the poor French Curé, Pius X. caused two inscriptions to be placed on either side of the entrance—thus

uniting the name of the priest glorified in heaven with that of the Pontiff who had glorified him on earth :

PASTOR BONE
 VENERABILIS JOANNES MARIA
 QUI
 CHRISTI VESTIGIA SEDULO PREMENS
 GREGEM TUUM
 CONTRA LUPUM FURENTEM NAVITER TUEBARIS
 JAM CÆLITUM GLORIA FELICITER POTITA
 SUPREMI PASTORIS
 GREGISQUE CHRISTI PIO CONCREDITI
 A PORTIS INFERI DIRE VEXATI
 PIE MEMENTO

(O good shepherd, Venerable Jean-Marie, who, ever treading in the footsteps of Christ, didst so manfully defend thy flock against the attacks of the marauding wolf and now hast happily attained to the glories of the Blessed ; be lovingly mindful of Pius, the Supreme Pastor, and of the flock of Christ which is in his keeping and direfully menaced by the powers of hell).

VENERABILIS DEI SERVUS
 JOANNES MARIA VIANNEY
 PAROCHUS VICI ARS IN GALLIA
 QUEM PIUS PAPA X PAROCHUS IPSE
 PASTORIS SECUNDUM COR JESU EXEMPLAR
 PIE VENERABATUR JAM PONTIFEX FACTUS
 BEATORUM CÆLITUM FASTIS LÆTUS ADCENSSET
 SACRI REGIMINIS ANNO SECUNDO
 AB IMMACULATO CONCEPTU SOLEMNITER ADSERTO
 QUINQUIES DECIMO

(The Venerable Servant of God Jean-Marie Vianney, Curé of the village of Ars, in France, whom Pius X., once a curé himself, lovingly venerated as an example of a pastor according to the Heart of Jesus and, when he had become Supreme Pontiff, joyfully enrolled in the ranks of the Blessed in the second year of his reign and the fiftieth after the solemn Definition of the Immaculate Conception).

In the various audiences granted to Catholics in general, and more especially to those of France, Pius X. never ceased to speak with enthusiasm of the Curé of Ars. To all, but particularly to priests, he held up the man whom he had recently proclaimed Blessed as their great example. " Take him as your model. Imitate the Blessed Jean-Marie in his zeal for preaching the truth, in bringing people to lead Christian lives, in his warfare with religious indifference."

But although the obligation of following in the footsteps of the Curé of Ars applies in a special manner to the clergy and all who have the care of souls; it also behoves the laity, especially in these troublous times, to profit by the example God has deigned to set before them in the life of this most humble and benign of His priests.

Mitis et humilis corde : meek and humble of heart, like unto Christ our Lord : Such was the ideal which Jean-Baptiste-Marie Vianney cherished and realised in his own person. It is the eternal ideal and there is no other. It is the portrait of Himself that Christ has left us—a portrait we must reproduce in our own selves if we would encompass His virtues and set them forth in our own lives. And such is the lesson conveyed by the honours rendered to the Curé of Ars. "The good God," he was wont to say, "has chosen me to be the instrument of His graces to sinners because I am the most ignorant and worthless of men. Could he have discovered a priest more worthless than myself in the diocese, God would have given him the preference." And again : "God has vouchsafed to me the great mercy of giving me nothing on which I can rely—neither talent, knowledge, strength, nor virtue."

Herein lay the secret of his sanctity and his influence. Indulgent to others, exacting to himself; contemning all the world esteems, wealth, honours, science, and trusting only in divine grace; never relying on himself, but always on God; he became, in the hands of his Master, a most admirable instrument of mercy, conversion and renewal of life. Destitute of human resources and material support, he accomplished works that astounded the world. He proved himself stronger than the strongest, because he knew himself to be feeble; he became greater than the greatest, because he only desired to be least among them all.

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POSTSCRIPT

It would appear that the pious aspiration of Mgr. de Langalerie at the funeral of M. Vianney—that the Curé of Ars might not *be so completely absorbed by the joys of paradise as to forget us, to fail to pray for and serve us*—still continues to be fulfilled. Miracles wrought at the intercession of the servant of God were authenticated by the Holy See in support of his beatification. And now we learn from Rome that, on 11th March, 1924, "A Preparatory Congregation of the S. Rites was held in the Vatican to discuss two miracles alleged to have been wrought by God at the intercession of Blessed Jean-Baptiste-Marie Vianney, Curé of Ars." (*The Tablet*, 22nd March, 1924). There is therefore good reason to hope that before long a formal decision of Holy Church may give the faithful throughout the world the gratification of invoking as *Saint* the man to whom the title has hitherto been accorded in token of veneration only.

